MY COUNTRY

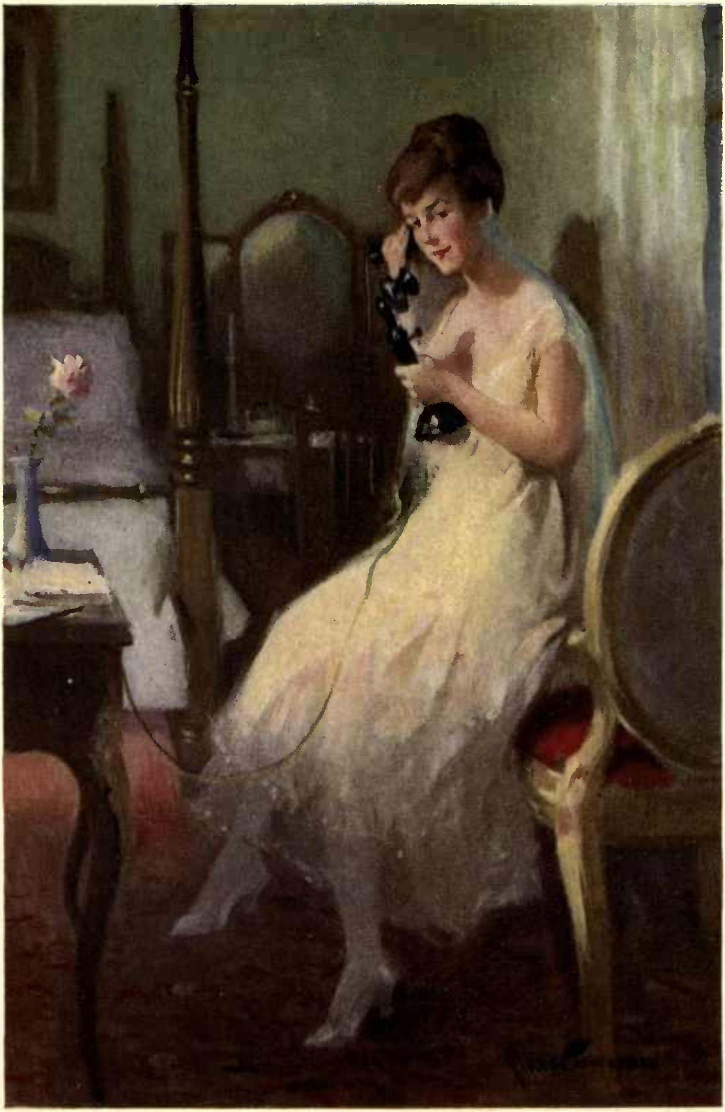
A STORY OF TODAY

GEORGE ROTHWELL BROWN

University of California
Southern Regional
Library Facility

604

MY COUNTRY



"Are you there, Senator? . . . . Why couldn't Billy Hartmann be made — — — Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief?" (Page 80)

MY COUNTRY

A STORY OF TODAY

BY

GEORGE ROTHWELL BROWN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHASE EMERSON

BOSTON
SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT, 1917
BY SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY
(INCORPORATED)

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

TO

Z. H.

2134255

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	STRANGERS AT THE DOOR	1
II	A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY	10
III	PURPLE EYES	17
IV	SUNSHINE AND SHADOW	26
V	THE IDOL ON THE ALTAR	36
VI	"THEN I'LL COME BACK TO YOU"	45
VII	THE CALL ACROSS THE SEA	60
VIII	MR. MONSON READS A LETTER	73
IX	WAITING ORDERS	82
X	ADDED ATTRACTION,—MLLE. FRALLI	92
XI	A LITTLE TRIP TO NAMASCHET	109
XII	A VOICE IN THE DARK	120
XIII	CORRIE GIVES A PARTY	145
XIV	IN SPITE OF ALL YOUR HEART	161
XV	ELFRIEDA HAS AN IDEA	172
XVI	THE PATHWAY TO A STAR	181
XVII	A WILDCAT IN A CAGE	193

CHAPTER PAGE
XVIII THE LAND OF YESTERDAY 216
XIX THE BLACK LEATHER CASE 238
XX MR. MONSON GETS AN EYEFUL . . . 269
XXI THE SPARK ON THE CHIMNEY 280
XXII THE PARTING OF THE WAYS 291
XXIII STRAIGHT OUT TO SEA, FIVE MILES . 316
XXIV "HOW CAN I LEAVE THEE?" 342

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Are you there, Senator? . . . Why could n't Billy Hartmann be made—Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief?" *See page* 80 . . . . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

"That, Frieda," he said, "is your flag—against everything" 172

She could not face the look that lay in his eyes 220

MY COUNTRY

MY COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

STRANGERS AT THE DOOR

"Elfrieda!"

There was no answer.

"Elfrieda!" Mrs. Sigbert's voice was deep, yet shrill. There was silence as she stood intently, an elderly woman, with a huge nose that was not quite exactly in the centre of her large, plain face, and snapping black eyes. Some one in the front of the house began strumming the piano again, monotonously and rebelliously. Mrs. Sigbert resumed her work, re-arranging the table, smoothing the cloth, that was already wrinkleless, and changing the plates about. Presently she called:

"Charlotte! Charlotte!"

The kitchen door opened, and Charlotte Sigbert, the eldest daughter, came into the room, a tall, ungainly, heavy-featured woman, all elbows, hips and knees, and strikingly like her mother, having the same large, crooked nose and swarthy complexion.

Her eyes redeemed the composite ugliness of her personality. These were large and luminous, as if glowing from some light within. She inclined her coarse, heavy head inquiringly.

"Charlotte!" Mrs. Sigbert's voice was pitched in the tone of command she always used. "The big dictionary from the sitting-room, and tell Helena to hurry with the sofa pillows. It is too bad that we have no high chairs. I am afraid the children will not be able to sit at the table."

Charlotte left the room, and returned almost immediately with the book hugged against her bosom. She placed it in one of the chairs. Helena, drab and quiet as a mouse, followed her, with an armful of bright red and blue plush sofa pillows, which her mother took from her and put into another of the eight chairs ranged around the table, which had been lengthened that afternoon by the addition of extra leaves so that it almost completely filled the dining room.

"*Nun!* . . . Everything is ready. Go tell Elsa not to forget the bay leaf in the soup. They should be here now," added Mrs. Sigbert, dusting a bit of lint from the tablecloth. "The train was to arrive at five. I hope that Greta did not miss them at the station. You should have gone, Charlotte, you, who know them, not Greta, who has not seen her uncle since she was a baby. Suppose she should have missed them?"

"I described them to her," replied Charlotte. "She could not make a mistake. You know I could not go, I had a lesson at four."

There was the noise of a door slamming, a commotion in the front hall, and a girl's voice shouting:

"Here they are! They 've come."

It had grown dark out of doors, and the hall gas had not been lighted. Mrs. Sigbert untied her heavy, dark apron, slipped it in the closet, and stood at the door, listening. There was the sound of a man's step, slow and uncertain. She drew in her breath expectantly. In a moment a big, bearded man in a heavy fur coat, and wearing a sealskin cap, came into the room, blinking at the light. He gazed about him, embarrassed, then took off his spectacles, which were frosted with snow, and put them into his pocket.

"Lottie!" he cried. "Well, here I am. You received my letter?"

"Yesterday," answered Mrs. Sigbert, staring at the half-brother whom she had not seen for nearly fifteen years.

"Then you know that I am bringing the children — my boys?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Sigbert, kissing him, and studying his face. "You have changed. You are much older than I had expected. You do not look well."

"I am well," he answered, and patted her shoulder awkwardly. He shook hands with Charlotte and Helena, and kissed them on both cheeks. His eyes roved over the room, and stopped when they rested upon a picture of the young Kaiser in a big, bronze frame that hung above the mantel. "It is like home," he said.

"It is the same as Germany in my house," replied his sister simply. "Here I have everything that is to me my Fatherland."

"You are still not happy?"

"Yes, and no," she answered slowly. "This is not my country, and my Alfred is gone, but I have my children, and I live in them."

"Maybe you will not be so lonely, now that I am here," suggested her brother, hopefully.

Charlotte and Helena shrugged their shoulders.

"This is not my country," repeated Mrs. Sigbert. "I remain because the business is not settled yet. Alfred left no will, and there has been much confusion. And then, when you go back, it will be worse, it always is when Charlotte goes back every Summer. Have you come on business? I hope you will stay with us long." She took his coat, from which he was struggling to free himself.

"Be with you long?" he repeated, looking at her as if astonished by the question. "Forever. I shall never return to Germany. That part of my life is finished."

"You are not going back!" cried his sister in amazement.

His face was turning red, the cords in his neck showed like whalebones above his collar, and the veins on his temples stood out under the skin like knotted cords. He slowly clenched and unclenched his long, muscular hands. Into his blue eyes flamed up a light that made the girls step back quickly, their lips parted.

"Never."

"Not going back?" stammered his sister. "Is Louisa, then, to join you here later on?"

"I shall never see her again," he said brokenly. He stood there gulping at them stupidly, his eyes filling with tears.

His sister went swiftly to him. "*Gott im Himmel,* Albert! Tell me, she is not dead?"

Her brother dully shook his head. His mouth quivered. Words came into his throat only to die there, strangled. His whole body began to shiver, his knees to tremble. He felt for a chair, and sat down.

"Not dead," he said at length, faintly, when he had controlled himself. Suddenly his limp hands became two rigid fists, and he dug his nails into his palms. "Worse than dead," he moaned. "*Ach, Gott,* Lottie, if she were only dead." He began rocking his huge body, backward and forward. "For a month I have held in my grief for the *kindchen.* They do not know, and they must never know, you must never tell them."

"Gott im Himmel!" said Mrs. Sigbert, and fell to cracking the joints of her big, coarse, raw-boned hands. *"Gott im Himmel!"*

"He was the Colonel of the garrison at Düsseldorf," continued her brother, when he had grown more calm, "Count von Heidenreich, a Prussian, tall, handsome, wealthy, a dashing figure of a man. The women spoke often about him. We met him, how, I do not know. We did not know him, and suddenly we knew him, that is all I can remember. He called at our house. I was flattered. It meant much to me, for he was influential. Why should I, Albert Hartmann, although my business was good, and I was prosperous, be the friend of such a great man, one of the nobility? It turned my head. I was proud to be seen with him. He was interested in me, and said that he could obtain a contract for me, and — "

"That was kind of him," interrupted Mrs. Sigbert. "A von Heidenreich!"

"He got the contract for me, through the Minister. I was happy. I saw my fortune made. I went up to Hamburg on this business, and was gone two months. I came back. I suspected nothing at first. And then, one day — I had no warning. I thought I should lose my senses. I rushed from the house, leaving Louisa on her knees, for she had confessed."

He paused, exhausted. Charlotte and Helena slily exchanged a morbid glance.

"I did not know what to do," he went on, "where to go. I ran here and there, and finally I saw him, and then I realized I had been searching for him all the time. He was walking with some officers, and sought to pass me by. I struck him!"

"Albert!" cried his sister, "you struck a von Heidenreich?"

"I did, thank God, I did. He drew his sword, and tried to cut me down, cut me down like a dog, in the street. I fought him, and he would have killed me, but some people got in the way, and I saw how hopeless it was. I escaped, otherwise I would not be here now. And he would have gone free if he had killed me, for that is the law. It would have been his right to kill me, his duty, for I had struck an officer. But I, because I had dared to raise my hand against him, I would have gone to prison. I saw my danger. I rushed to my home, my pretty home, all ruined, ruined, ruined! I took the twins, Wilhelm and Karl. They are my heart, mine, mine, mine. I gathered them into my arms, just as they were. Fortunately I did not have to wait for a train, and in three-quarters of an hour I was over the frontier in Rotterdam, and safe."

" Albert! " cried his sister, and began weeping.

" At London I wrote to you, for I thought I would go to America. I had always longed to go, ever since my boyhood. Well, here I am, to stay. God help me, I am through with Germany."

The family stood grouped about him, in silence. Greta Sigbert, who had met the visitors at the railroad station, and had brought them to the house, had come into the room as he was speaking, and stood in the shadows, by the hall door. By her side were two sturdy little figures, muffled up in woolly coats, and wearing small round caps on their closely-cropped heads. They were clasping hands, and staring around them with wide-open blue eyes.

" Hush! " said the father, " here are Wilhelm and Karl. They must not know."

"Which is which?" asked Mrs. Sigbert, stooping to kiss them; "I do not see how you can tell them apart. Take the dictionary and the sofa pillows away, Charlotte," she added, "they are larger than I had imagined they would be; they are not babies."

The sliding door between the dining room and the drawing room slowly opened, and two big violet eyes calmly surveyed them. Presently the crack widened, and a slender, graceful, long-legged child wriggled through. A heavy mane of dark brown curly hair fell down around a little face of the Italian type, a haunting face, the kind of face that artists love.

Mrs. Sigbert motioned towards her, nodding at her brother.

"Elfrieda, whom you have never seen," she said. "She was born in America."

CHAPTER II

A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

The Sigberts were transplanted Americans who had sprouted but one root. When they had come to the United States, nearly fifteen years before, they had not left Germany — they had brought it with them. They lived in the German style, ate German food cooked in the German way, and until the children went to the public schools, were as little subject to American influences as if they had been living still in their old home in Düsseldorf. Mrs. Sigbert read nothing but German books and German newspapers, and although she could not prevent the children from learning English in the schools, and did not desire to do so, for she was ambitious for them, and wanted them to speak and read all the modern languages, she insisted upon the exclusive use of German in the family circle.

Mr. Sigbert, a slender little man, with such a stoop in the shoulders that he seemed at first glance to be a hunchback, was very nearsighted, and as he was never able to recognize anybody upon the street, and was always engrossed in his studies when he was at home, he gradually retired within himself to such an extent that the very pall-bearers who carried his body from the house when he died had never known him. He conducted a business in astronomical and scientific instruments which his family knew so little about that after his death his widow probably would have lost it entirely, but for the intervention of an old friend, who had removed from Prussia about the time that they had come to America, and who took charge of it for her, organized a company to assume the management, and gradually put it upon a sound and substantial basis. Thus the property was conserved, and two years after her husband's death Mrs. Sigbert found herself in comfortable circumstances. She hoped eventually to be able to withdraw entirely from the business, and return to Germany, where the eldest daughter, Charlotte, went every summer, to study music in the schools at Berlin and Munich.

She had never known why her husband had left Germany, and had come with him only because he had packed the family off one day, without any explanation, selling his business in Düsseldorf, and starting anew, in the same line, when he had reached America. A silent man, always buried in a book when he was not at his laboratory, Mr. Sigbert had no confidants, not even his wife, who gradually became to him little more than a housekeeper. Almost as soon as he had arrived he took out his first naturalization papers, and then forgot all about it, and so never completed the legal process of becoming a citizen, although he had announced to his family that it was his intention to do so. The ambiguousness of his position as a man practically without a country did not, apparently, concern him, and he died to all intents neither a German nor an American.

Mrs. Sigbert said little. She knew how to keep her own counsel, but she had never renounced her citizenship, legally or spiritually, and would have scoffed the idea that she was anything but a German. Three of the daughters, Charlotte, the eldest, Helena, and Greta, had been born in Prussia, and only the youngest, Elfrieda, bound the family to the soil and flag of their adopted country.

There is some vitalizing quality in the climate of America that gives to its native sons and daughters that indefinable stamp of nationality that is the outward sign of the American character, that mysterious something that is the common heritage of all who were born north of the Rio Grande, clear to the Arctic Circle, that makes the Mississippi cotton planter the brother of the Michigan lumberman and the Gloucester fisherman, and the fair-haired, blue-eyed boy one generation from the fjords of Norway, and reared in a Rocky Mountain cañon two hundred miles from any visible influence, blood kin to the descendants of the Puritan and the Cavalier. Elfrieda had this heritage, which has put its unmistakable imprint upon everything American, from the Indian who first saw the *Half Moon* in the Hudson, to the very newest mite of humanity squalling in a basket on an Allen street fire-escape. Elfrieda, for this reason, was a great trial to Mrs. Sigbert.

The arrival of her half-brother, although it had pleased her, for loyalty to blood was a strong family trait, was at the same time a cause of much concern to her. For many months she had secretly cherished the dream of returning to Germany to live, and it had been her intention to suggest this plan as soon as her husband's business affairs had been settled.

Now, she feared, an obstacle had arisen to prevent the carrying out of this great scheme. Her brother not only was firm in his determination never again to return to Germany, but he was enthusiastic in his efforts to become an American citizen as quickly as possible, and interested himself in this project even before he had established himself in business, which his sister had insisted was the first duty he owed to himself and to his boys.

"There is time enough for that," her brother said on one occasion, when she brought the subject up, "I have ample means for the present, and it is better that I should look about carefully before I invest my money."

"You will see Adolph Bruch tonight?" she asked, as if she were craving a favor.

"You think I should take his advice in business matters?"

"He has done everything for us," replied his sister; "without him I am afraid we would have lost the property. As it is, its value has been increased. He is the very man for you to talk to."

As a result of this conversation Mr. Hartmann finally made a small investment in a lumber company, one of the minor units in the enterprise which Mr. Bruch was then quietly organizing into a great trust that was reaching out beyond the borders of his own State, where he was already supreme. Mr. Hartmann knew nothing about lumber, but he was a shrewd and conservative business man, and the step he had just taken, in breaking away from the social and economic ties of a lifetime, having given him a vigorous mental jolting, his natural prudence became tempered with the spirit of adventure. He threw himself into his work with the desperate energy of a man whose life had been shaken to its foundations, and in a short time he had firmly established himself as an aggressive factor in the lumber world, a man to be reckoned with.

His sister's pride was mingled with regret. She was glad, for his sake, that he was doing well, but she saw in his success an impediment to her own plan.

" He will never return to Germany," she thought. She realized that it would be harder for her to go, leaving him behind. " The two boys, too," she added to herself, " they will not want to leave, now."

Wilhelm and Karl had adapted themselves to their new surroundings with the philosophy of youth. With the very first new clothes that had been bought for them to replace the things they had worn on the long journey from Düsseldorf, they had become American boys, for such is the levelling influence of a coat. Their hair had grown, and they would not have it clipped again.

" The boys laugh at me," said Wilhelm, explaining his objection to his aunt. " I am always fighting them as it is. They have got to stop calling me 'Wilhelm,' too. My name is William."

And William it became in the family until Elfrieda shortened it to " Billy." After that there was less fighting to be done. Names travel from the home and the back yard, to the street and the school room. It was not long before Billy Hartmann had established himself and his name as a part of the small life of the neighborhood, and as time went on, and the scenes of his early childhood faded from his memory, he thought of himself as being not at all different in any way from his companions. But Karl remained Karl.

CHAPTER III

PURPLE EYES

Mrs. Sigbert sat in the sunny bow window of her pleasant dining room. Ranged in regular order upon the flower stand at her back were the plants upon which she lavished a mother's care, upstanding, green, without a faded leaf to mar their freshness. They always had just enough sun, just enough water, and no more.

The silver and glass on the sideboard sparkled from vigorous application of polish and soap. The dishes in the china closet shone, like so many bright-eyed children who had just had their faces washed. The mahogany gleamed in the sunlight, without a blemish. On the window-sill lay a big gray cat, asleep. Billy was playing marbles on the rug with Frieda, who was growing into a rangy child, as fond of out-door sports as any boy. Their voices rose in shrill dispute.

"Children! Children!" cried Mrs. Sigbert, "quarrel in German! Frieda! You are teaching your cousin to forget his native tongue. You must speak German in the house."

Frieda paid no attention, but reached over slily, and seized a marble.

"Give that to me," said Billy, angrily.

"I shan't, it 's mine."

"It is not."

"You said I could have all the blue ones."

"That one is not blue, it is purple, like your eyes."

"My eyes are not purple."

"They are, too, Aunt Lottie," said Billy stoutly. "They are that way often, not all the time, but I have seen them when they were."

"You children should quarrel in German," insisted Mrs. Sigbert. "I do not want to speak about it again, Elfrieda."

Elfrieda's eyes began to blaze, a sign that her mother had learned not to ignore. It meant that her mind was made up, that all the stubborn instincts of her nature were in revolt, that nothing could move her.

"You speak German well now, but you will forget it," sighed Mrs. Sigbert.

"Oh, bother," replied Elfrieda, searching for another blue marble.

"You listen in German, but you answer in English. Why do you not speak German, sing in German?"

"Oh," answered Elfrieda, "it is ugly, it is . . . *hinausgestrung!*"

"What can I do with such a child?" cried poor Mrs. Sigbert.

The three older girls spoke English without the slightest accent, for even Charlotte had gone to school long enough to have mastered it, not as a student, but as one who is obliged to use it every day; but Mrs. Sigbert, and Elsa, the cook, whom they had brought from Germany with them, after so many years, still spoke it so brokenly as to be at times almost unintelligible. But whatever they lacked in accent they made up in volubility.

For the benefit of Billy and Karl, who had been sent to school with Elfrieda, the whole family, despite Mrs. Sigbert's protests, had gradually come to abandon the use of German as the language of conversation, so that the twins were able to make great progress in mastering the new tongue through which they would have to obtain their education. Elfrieda took such advantage of this that she exasperated her mother still more by refusing to sing in German. The little songs which she was compelled to practise were in German, but she made up English words for them, and nearly drove her mother wild by singing barbaric jingles in slang, composed on the spot, to the tunes of quaint old German folk songs. Between keeping her at the piano for two hours every afternoon, and three hours on Saturdays, and preventing her from desecrating the music of the Fatherland, Mrs. Sigbert sometimes felt that she had little time left to devote to her principal object in life, which was to keep the house immaculate, from cellar to garret.

" It is time to study your lessons," said Mrs. Sigbert, looking at the clock. The sun had gone down beyond the hills, over whose crest a bank of storm clouds were gathering. She rose, pulled down the shades, and lighted the gas, and the children, looking at each other hopelessly, put their marbles in the bag and dragged themselves to the dining table, which was covered with a bright red cloth. They got out their books, and fell into an argument.

" We will do the arithmetic first," said Billy.

" No, the history first," insisted Elfrieda with determination. Billy put down the arithmetic. " There is to be an examination tomorrow, and I am almost sure to be called on to recite ' The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere.' "

" Himmel! " said Mrs. Sigbert, " what nonsense is that? It is not the proper thing to be putting such ideas into the minds of the young. Midnight! It is not a good hour for any child to be taking a ride."

"You don't understand, Aunt Lottie," laughed Billy. "This Paul Revere — "

"Don't tell me, I don't want to hear it," said Mrs. Sigbert. "I suppose it has something to do about that Bunker Hill that Elfrieda was fretting about the other night."

"I was perfect in it," said Frieda proudly, "and passed. If I had n't known about that I would have failed. I remembered the date and everything."

"Do you remember the date of the birth of Frederick the Great?" asked Mrs. Sigbert bitterly. "Why do they not teach the history of Prussia, and of the German Empire, in the schools?"

"But mother," said Frieda, "that would be all right in Germany. This is the United States."

"It is not my country," answered Mrs. Sigbert. "You are learning in the schools to be Americans, not Germans."

"That is right. That is as it should be." Mrs. Sigbert looked up, and saw that her brother had come into the room.

"As it should be?" she asked. "Are my children to be weaned away from their mother? It is nothing to me, this Bunker Hill, and yet, if Elfrieda does not know the date she cannot pass, and all her time is wasted at school."

"Children must know the history of their country, else they cannot be good citizens," said Mr. Hartmann.

"Citizens? That is not necessary . . . My husband — "

"I think it is very necessary," said her brother. "They are to live here, are they not? They will go from the school to the college, they will go into business, or a profession, and marry — "

"Elfrieda and I?" spoke up Billy, rising quickly, and leaning across the table.

"What 's that?"

"Elfrieda and I will get married, you said," answered Billy, looking at her.

"Why — why — I did not say that," replied his father.

"You did, sir," insisted Billy. "That is right, we are going to get married, are n't we, Frieda?"

"You are silly," said Elfrieda. "I am going on the stage and be a — a great dancer, the greatest in the world. Kings and emperors — and — dukes will pay to get in and — and stand up at the back."

"I cannot permit that, Frieda," answered Billy slowly. "We are going to get married. Father said so."

"I was speaking generally," laughed Mr. Hartmann. "I said you would grow up, and go into business, and get married, and have children of your own, all of you, I mean, everybody, boys like you and girls like Frieda. You will form ties here that cannot be broken without tearing the heartstrings from you. I hope you two will never come to that. I want you to stay here always."

"This is my country, I shall stay," said Billy, "and Frieda will stay with me, won't you?"

"You cannot learn to be a dancer here," answered Elfrieda. "I think I shall go away to study, like Charlotte."

"That is nonsense," said Mrs. Sigbert; "who put such notions in your head? The money we have must be spent on Greta."

"Frieda sings better than Greta," said Billy. "I would rather listen to her sing than anybody in the world. There is something — I cannot tell you how it makes me feel when I stand in the doorway, when she does not know that I am there, and listen to her sing."

"You must not do that," cried Frieda, but flashed at him nevertheless a look from her dark violet eyes that made him blush to the roots of his hair.

"Come! come!" said Mr. Hartmann, laughing heartily. A tall, heavy-set man, with a clearer skin than men of his race and age usually have, the time he had spent in America had taken the sorrow from his eyes, and there was a firmness about the mouth, and an alertness of movement that were new to him. The competition of business life had given him American mannerisms, a crispness of speech and activity of motion that made him seem like a different man. He stood looking down at the two children, and patted Elfrieda on her head. " You are too young yet, to think about such things, and you are cousins, too."

" They are half cousins," corrected Mrs. Sigbert.

" That is so. Well, perhaps, who can tell? It would not be so bad, after all, eh?" He stooped suddenly, and kissed the girl upon the hair. " Look," he said, taking a black leather case from his pocket, " see here, Frieda, Billy and Karl are Americans now, as you are."

" As Frieda!" cried Mrs. Sigbert. " She is German."

" She was born in America," said her brother. " This is her native land, and now it is my country, too."

He opened the case, and spread some papers upon the table. " See," he said, " the courts have made me an American citizen. I am an American now, by the law, and I have made Billy and Karl Americans, also."

The door opened, and Karl came in, with Charlotte, who had taken him to a concert.

"Look, Karl, my naturalization papers," said his father. "I did not tell any of you about it until I had got all of them. I am an American."

CHAPTER IV

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

"Do it for me, Wilhelm," begged Karl, one morning, as they were going out to school.

"Go get your own picture taken," returned Billy, "and moreover, stop calling me Wilhelm. I won't have it."

"Will you do it?"

"I am going to play ball this afternoon," replied Billy, thinking of another excuse.

"It won't take but a minute, just a tin-type."

"Oh, all right then."

"If it were n't for this boil on my nose I would n't ask you," said Karl. "I can't get my picture taken like this, and — I 've got to have it, that 's all."

"I suppose you want it for that Schoenleber girl," remarked Billy, giving his brother an exasperating look.

"You quit now, Wilhelm."

"If you don't stop calling me Wilhelm I 'll give you something else on your nose besides a boil," said Billy, flaring up.

"I 'll stop it, if you 're so fussy," agreed Karl, ungraciously. "The main thing is to get the picture. Margaretha is going away tomorrow."

"Oh!" jeered Billy, "so you do want it for your girl."

"I guess I 've got as much right to have a girl as you have," cried Karl angrily.

"Huh! I have n't got any girl, I — "

"You have so," said Karl spitefully. "Is n't Elfrieda your girl? Everybody knows it."

"Well, anyhow," answered Billy, turning red, "I 've got sense enough to pick out a pretty one."

"Elfrieda is n't any prettier than Margaretha," Karl blazed up.

"Don't you say that again."

"It 's the truth."

"It is n't."

"It is."

The two boys stood on the steps, glaring at each other.

"Then I won't have my photograph taken for you," grinned Billy. "I don't want Margaretha to be carrying my picture around with her anyhow, even if she does think it 's yours."

"You 've got to do it," said Karl desperately. "Just look at this boil. Besides, you 've promised."

"All right," Billy said, "I 'll do it for you, Karl."

"Do what?" demanded Frieda, joining them on the front porch.

"Oh, nothing," said Karl, looking away. "Don't tell." His eyes implored.

"All right, I won't," said Billy, "but you 've got to walk a chalk line with me hereafter." Karl was humbled. The three started off to school, Billy carrying Elfrieda's books.

At the gate Margaretha Schoenleber, who lived next door, came up, and they walked down the street together.

"Why don't you carry my books, Karl?" asked Margaretha, who was hurriedly finishing her breakfast on the sidewalk. Invariably late, she always came rushing from the house at the last minute, mouth and hands full. This morning she was clutching a handful of seed cakes.

Karl, blushing, took her books. Thereafter she made more progress, and presently was able to take part in the conversation.

"You will have the picture today, Karl?" she whispered, swallowing the last remnant of crumbs.

He nodded.

"Mine came last night," she went on. "I will give you one this afternoon — if you really want it."

"Of course I want it, Margaretha." He looked at her sidewise, under his hat-brim, and she turned away, her face quite pink.

Margaretha was as tall as Elfrieda, and as fair as she was dark, but her complexion was beginning to show the effect of too much heavy food, for the Schoenlebers sometimes ate six meals a day, and Margaretha was already suffering, in looks, the consequences of gluttony. A naturally good figure was being spoiled. In a few years she would be fat, but as a young girl she was as yet wholesome looking and robust. Karl was blind to any defects, present or prospective. He saw only that her eyes were blue, like the sky, that her heavy hair was yellow, the color of corn-silk.

That afternoon, when school was out, Karl held Billy to his promise.

"Can't we put it off until tomorrow?" asked Billy. "The ball team —"

"It must be done now, or not at all," replied Karl, squinting ruefully at the boil on his nose.

"Well, come on, then."

They went around the corner, where an artist in tin-types had a studio, a big, wagon-like affair, without any wheels, in a yard next to a grocery store. On the fence in front was a glass case, containing many specimens of his work.

"I want one like that," said Karl, indicating an atrocious tin-type that looked as though it had been taken by the light of Vesuvius.

"All right." They walked in, and Billy sat down, put his head into an iron frame, and began glaring. The photographer gave the rack a twist that nearly dislocated his neck, and stood off and surveyed him approvingly, one eye closed, his tongue in his cheek.

"Be quick," said Billy, "you are killing me."

The artist enshrouded himself, and raised a warning hand.

"Hold on," cried Karl, suddenly leaping in front of the camera.

"What 's the matter?"

"You have on a blue tie. I never wear blue ones."

"It will not show blue in the picture," said the photographer, scowling. "You have spoiled a fine pose."

"I never wear that kind of a necktie," insisted Karl, "and besides, look at that high collar. I never wear collars like that."

"Let 's call it off, then," answered Billy, relieved.

"No, no, you must change collars with me."

"Hang it, Karl, you are too much trouble."

"Think of my boil," pleaded Karl. "I would do as much for you."

"Well, all right then." Billy took off his collar and tie, and put on Karl's, and settled himself once more into the inquisitorial instrument of torture.

"Wait," cried Karl, "you must put on my coat, too."

Billy glared, but put on the coat. "Now," he said, "shall I take off my shoes?"

"They won't show in the picture," replied Karl, seriously.

"You are stupid, Karl," said Billy. "Well, I 'm ready now." The picture was taken, and they waited until the artist had completed the lightning-like development.

"It is fine," said Billy.

"She will never know the difference," admitted Karl; "you look exactly like me."

"I do not," said Billy angrily, "you look like me."

Karl felt that he could afford to be generous, and silently conceded, for the time being, the point that was always in dispute between them. They walked out.

"Here comes Neil Lawson," and Billy called to him. Neil was his most intimate friend, a good looking little fellow, with a bright eye and as clean-cut and dapper as a fox terrier. He came bounding up joyously.

"Say," said Karl, turning toward his brother, "you won't tell him?"

"Why not?" demanded Billy, who had reached that stage where he told Neil everything. "It 's a good joke, is n't it?"

The perspiration broke out on Karl's forehead. "You would n't do a mean thing like that, Billy, would you?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied his brother, mollified. He liked to be called "Billy," but could rarely induce Karl to use the nickname.

"Promise you won't."

"Why should I?"

Karl dug at a loose brick in the sidewalk with his toe, and his face slowly turned red.

"Oh, I see," said Billy, exasperatingly, "Neil would tell Margaretha, and then she would have it on you." He laughed. "Neil likes her, too."

"That is why," confessed Karl, desperately. "You won't tell?"

"Why, no," replied Billy, looking at his brother curiously. "I did not know you liked her as much as that, Karl. How long?"

"A long time," said Karl. "And now she is going away."

Billy thought, "Suppose it were Elfrieda who was going away!" Then he said, "All right, I will never tell anybody."

Karl carried the tin-types home, found Margaretha on her front porch, and the exchange of keepsakes was made.

Billy went off with Neil and played baseball until dinner time. He was in the back yard when Margaretha came by her kitchen window. She held up something proudly.

"See what I have," said Margaretha.

"Oh, that 's nothing."

"You are jealous," answered Margaretha, coming to the fence, and sticking out her tongue at him.

"Jealous?"

She showed him the picture. "Yes, you are jealous," she said tauntingly. "Karl is better looking than you are, that 's why."

"Elfrieda is better looking than you are," retorted Billy chivalrously.

"She is not."

"She is so."

"I am glad I am going away," said Margaretha.

"So am I — No, I am not, Margaretha," he added hastily. "I am sorry."

"Really?" She softened toward him.

"I am, that is true, Margaretha."

"As sorry as if — as if Elfrieda were going away?"

"No," he replied slowly, "not as sorry as that. Nothing could make me as sorry as that, I think."

Mrs. Sigbert came to the dining room window, her swarthy face almost white, and fear in her eyes.

"Wilhelm!" she screamed, "come quickly!"

He ran into the house, his legs, for some strange reason, shaking beneath him. He had never heard that note in her voice before.

"What is it, Aunt Lottie?"

"Your father!"

"What!"

"I do not know! *Ach Himmel!* He is in there," and she pointed to the folding door. "Greta has gone for the doctor."

"Doctor!" Billy began trembling, why, he did not know. He went into the drawing room. Mr. Hartmann was sitting in a chair, and Billy had never seen in any one's face the expression that he now saw in his father's.

"Father!" he cried, and stood staring at him in terror.

Mr. Hartmann tried to speak, and could not. He had taken from his pocket a little black leather case, which he held in his hand. Billy, seeing what was in his eyes, took it. His father attempted again to say something. His head fell forward, and he slipped down in the chair as Greta and the doctor came into the room.

"What is it, what is it?" cried Billy, in an agony of fear.

The doctor shook his head.

"I have come too late," he said.

CHAPTER V

THE IDOL ON THE ALTAR

The death of Mr. Hartmann had little effect, apparently, upon the well-ordered life of the Sigbert family, but its psychological influence was tremendous. It brought Mrs. Sigbert to a decision to return to Germany as soon as the business could be disposed of and the girls persuaded to agree to the plan. But objections constantly arose as time went on.

" Now that my brother is no longer with us," she said one day, " there is less reason than ever for our remaining here. Frieda will soon be through the high school, and she can finish her education in Berlin. That is where I have always wanted to live."

" I do not know," Helena answered doubtfully. She was in the normal school, and looked forward with eagerness to the time when she would have an independent income from teaching.

" You can teach as well in Germany," reminded her mother. " I no longer wish to remain. I have few friends here."

"We have no friends in Germany," said Helena. "My friends are all here, now."

"Charlotte has friends in Berlin, and in Munich, too."

"Still, they are not mine."

"But you can make friends, among your own people."

"These are our own people," interjected Elfrieda. "Why should we go back to Germany, among strangers."

"It is different with you," replied her mother. "You were born here, in America, and you have known only the friends you have made here, but it is not so with the rest of us. We came from Germany, we are Germans."

"I am not sure," said Helena slowly. "I used to think about Germany, but now — I do not know. Sometimes I feel almost as Elfrieda does."

"If I do not take them back soon," thought Mrs. Sigbert, "they will not want to go at all."

"Margaretha Schoenleber is terribly homesick," said Elfrieda. "Her letters are full of tears."

"She was anxious to live in Germany," cried her mother, "she was always talking about it, and saying how much better Germany was than the United States. The Schoenlebers always talked that way. I used to love to listen to them."

" Margaretha does not think so now," insisted Elfrieda.

" She will get over it," Mrs. Sigbert said, shaking her head sagely. " In a little while she will be as good a German as though she had been born there. Think how splendid it would be for us if we should go. Charlotte could increase her income there, for the field is larger, and Madame Ruhlmann has asked her again to become her accompanist. It would be a fine thing for all of us for her to be associated with such a great opera singer."

" I don't want to go," said Elfrieda, who was in one of her sulky moods. " Uncle Albert always said there was a better chance for everybody, in America."

" In business, yes," replied her mother, hopelessly; " in art, no."

" Anyhow, I don't want to go."

" Always she has said she wanted to be a dancer, though how she can be a dancer without practising I cannot see, and now, when there is a chance to go to Germany, where all the singers and dancers are, she complains, and drives me crazy with her whims. Elfrieda! She is *schrecklich!* "

" Charlotte would teach, and Greta would have all the money for music and things spent on her, and you would make a school teacher of me. I do not want to teach school," said Elfrieda, "but if I must, I shall teach in this country, and make money of my own, and maybe some day I shall be able to go on the stage, and do something in the world."

Charlotte came in, a letter in her hand, her eyes shining with such exaltation that her plain face was almost handsome. She laid her umbrella upon the table, and exclaimed dramatically:

"What do you think? Ruhlmann is coming!"

The family was thrown into confusion. The great German prima donna was the deity of the Sigbert family. They worshipped her, not merely because Charlotte knew her. They adored her as an artist.

"Coming to the United States?" asked Mrs. Sigbert. "There is no opera now."

"Here to this city, to this house," replied Charlotte. "On her way back from Australia she will stop here."

"She will hear Greta sing, and we shall know," said Mrs. Sigbert reverently.

"That is why she is coming," replied Charlotte. "It was a great favor, I hardly dared to ask it, but she consented, and she will be here soon. I would not tell you until it was settled. Now we shall know."

Greta Sigbert was the hope and pride of the family. She had been studying vocal music for several years, and had a fine contralto voice that had been well trained under the best teachers. Mrs. Sigbert had selected them herself, for she was a musical critic of ability. She had inspired the whole family with her restless ambition, drove them continually to their studies, and kept the piano going from morning until night, so that one of the girls never left the bench but another was waiting to take her place. Greta was acknowledged to be the most promising.

She not only sang well, but was gifted with fine musical sense and judgment. Small and delicate, but tireless, the family for years had built upon her their hopes for fame and wealth.

Naturally, there was intense excitement as the date of Madame Ruhlmann's visit drew near, and by the time the day actually arrived the entire family was in a state bordering on hysteria.

She came, in a carriage, late in the afternoon, wrapped in wonderful sables. Still a beautiful woman, with the rounded throat of a singer, and regular, almost classical features, the delicate lines of her face showed intellect and character. Her blonde hair was beginning to be streaked with gray, but this, to the casual glance, seemed only to make it of a lighter shade.

Mrs. Sigbert had prepared an elaborate *Kaffeekränzchen,* but to her great disappointment Madame refused everything, and when pressed to eat, finally admitted that she lived almost entirely on oatmeal, a confession that would have lost the respect of Mrs. Sigbert for anybody else.

She had only a short time to stay, and was ready to hear Greta sing.

Greta sang. She was tired and nervous, and did not do as well as when she practised alone. Everyone was chagrined, and Charlotte was on the verge of tears. She sang again, "*Dich, theure Halle.*" Disappointment was on every face.

Madame thought she had a good voice, and musical instinct. It was plain that she was not impressed. Greta, crushed, left the piano.

"You have a talented family, Mrs. Sigbert," said Madame Ruhlmann. "I hope to have Charlotte with me."

Mrs. Sigbert was inarticulate. "Greta will be a failure," she thought; "we shall not go back home, now."

"Are all the girls musical?" asked Madame.

"Helena does not play much," replied Mrs. Sigbert, finding her voice at last. "She is studying to be a teacher in the public schools. My youngest daughter, Elfrieda, plays and sings, too, but she is such a poor student that she does nothing well."

"I would rather hear her sing than anybody in all the world," said Billy, and did not know what those few words would cost him in the years to come.

"Really!" Ruhlmann's eyes were dancing. "Sing for me, dear."

Elfrieda came forward hesitatingly. "I play because mother makes me," she said; "I sing because I like to sing."

Ruhlmann turned to look at her as she walked into the light. "Ah!" she said.

"What shall I sing?"

"Anything."

Elfrieda sang:

How can I leave thee, while I do love thee so?
Thou art my all in all, truly my own!
Thou hast this soul of mine so firmly lock'd in thine,
That my heart e'er will be thine, love, alone.

"Not in English!" cried poor Mrs. Sigbert, wringing her hands. "What will Madame Ruhlmann think of you?"

"Ah!" said Ruhlmann. "Never mind. Sing to me again, child."

She sang Coenen's *"Das Frühlingslied,"* and Ruhlmann asked for more, and then she sang, in

English, a gay little ballad of the streets, Mrs. Sigbert's hands raised meanwhile, in horror at the sacrilege. But Frieda did not care, but went on, as if she had been singing for Billy, and sang as the Sigberts had never heard her sing before.

As she finished, and left the piano, Ruhlmann rushed to her, and threw her arms around her neck, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I make no mistake, I am sure," she said dramatically, "when I say that I salute one of the greatest future singers."

Mrs. Sigbert sank back in her chair, incapable of moving.

"I must tell you," Ruhlmann went on, "it is only fair for me to say, that in my judgment Greta can never win success on the stage. She sings with intelligence and fine musical appreciation, but she is not big enough, not colorful enough, for opera. Moreover, she is delicate, she could never undergo the training. And she lacks the temperamental qualities. Let her keep to church work, and teaching, for that is better than to give up everything for the unattainable ideal. But this girl — " She took Elfrieda by the hand. "Here is the voice I have long sought. She is strong, and when she is a woman she will have the figure for heroic rôles. She has the strength to live through all the body-breaking, sometimes heart-breaking, work that she will have to do — and she is beautiful."

"Frieda, your eyes are purple now!" cried Billy, forgetting where he was.

"It is the temperament," smiled Ruhlmann. "She is brimming over with it, she has enough to divide with all the family. Child," she added, "I am more than proud to point a brilliant future for so talented a girl."

Greta, in tears, had slipped away, and none had seen her go. A new idol was on the family altar. Mrs. Sigbert looked at Elfrieda as if she had found a daughter whom she had never known before.

CHAPTER VI

"THEN I'LL COME BACK TO YOU"

Elfrieda was in the grape-arbor, at the end of the yard, reading a book in the hammock that was swung between two posts. Billy found her there.

"Are you glad that we are going back to Germany?" she asked.

He pulled a leaf to pieces, not daring to look at her. "I am not going," he said at length.

"Not going?"

"I shall remain here."

"You would be lonesome, you could not stand it."

"One must learn to stand things when one is a man."

"Poof! You are a boy."

"I—I—you do not know how I feel, sometimes, Elfrieda."

He turned, and looked at her, and his body began to tremble. She glanced away, quickly, and the blood tinted her cheeks.

"What could you do here?" she asked, banter in her voice.

"I do not know. I shall have my share in the property, and then, when I have finished school, I can go into business if I have to, but I would rather do something else."

"What could you do?"

"I do not know."

"That is because you are not a man," she said lightly. "Men know what they want to do."

"You are a woman, yet you did not know what you wanted do to until Ruhlmann told you that you could be a singer. I wish she had never come. Before, you did not know what you wanted to do — now, you *must* be a singer."

"I always knew," said Frieda, slowly, "only I did not know how to express myself."

"You used to say you would be a dancer," he reminded her.

"It is the same thing. I always wanted to do something in the world."

"That is how I feel. I shall do it, too — for you, Elfrieda."

"For me?"

"I — I love you, Frieda."

She could not look at him now.

"They have no right to take you back to Germany."

"I suppose it is for the best."

"You did not talk that way before. You always said you did not want to go."

"I see things differently, now."

"And so do I. If you go away I shall not have you, you will forget me."

"No, I shall not."

"Why should we go to Germany, Elfrieda? We are Americans, you and I. We would not be happy there, and I — I want to make you happy."

"I must go back," she said, "you do not understand, Billy. Now, I must."

"It is Ruhlmann," he cried passionately, "she has spoiled everything. You will try to be a great singer, and waste your life, and I shall have to go on without you, and it will break my heart."

"Oh!" said Elfrieda, and clasped her hands tightly.

"It is true, I cannot live without you, Frieda. I do not want to live without you. All I want in the world is you. It is all I have ever wanted, ever since I saw you first. You shan't go back to Germany."

"I must go back, I cannot study here, and now that my great opportunity has come — something is urging me on that is stronger than myself, something that I cannot resist."

"I know," he said dully, "I feel it too, sometimes. It is urging me on to have you, and I must have you, Frieda, I must, I tell you. And I shall, some day, I know it, I feel it. You are mine, and nothing shall take you from me. Please don't go back to Germany. After all, it is only going back for your mother, and the rest. You have never been. This is your home, you were born here, you are an American."

"It would be going back for you," she said. "You were not born here. You are a Prussian."

"Not now," said Billy, "my father changed all that. You remember what he said that night when he came home and told us that the courts had made him an American? He said that by the law I was made an American, too. I have never forgotten that. This is my country, and I shall stay here, where he is buried. Your father, too, is buried here, Elfrieda. You should remain with me, even if all the rest return."

"I could not do that."

"Then I must stay alone."

"What will mother say?" asked Frieda.

"I do not care what Aunt Lottie says," replied Billy, closing his lips very tightly. "I have thought it all out. Whatever happens, whatever they may say or do, I shall not go back to Germany. There was something my father left behind him there that broke his heart, something he would never tell me, something I have never dared to ask about. I won't go back, I can't go back."

"Not even if I go?"

"If you should go it would be to study and work to be a singer. You would have no room then, for me, and I should only be in the way."

"You would not even go to see me?"

"Well, yes, I might do that. Would you want me to?"

"Yes."

"Very much?"

"Y — yes."

"The most in the world, more than anything else?"

"Yes, Billy."

"Frieda! They are purple now. For me?"

"Yes, I — I guess so."

"You love me? Say you love me, Frieda."

She raised her eyes to his.

"Frieda!"

"Yes," she said, smiling.

"I know," he whispered, his voice full of awe, "you do not need to tell me, it is in your eyes. I never saw a light like that before."

Their lips met, and suddenly he was in the hammock with her, and she was in his arms, and they were off, together, upon a cloud, to Fairyland.

The soft sun filtered down upon them, the grape leaves stirred above them in the breeze, a bird flew in, and perched upon a twig, and sat there, preening its feathers, undisturbed.

"Oh, Elfrieda!" He drew her closer to him. "I cannot let you go."

"Maybe it will not be many years."

"Years! I could not stand it. You will come back, some day."

"Of course."

"Do you promise?"

"Well, yes, if you ask it."

"I do; I want you to come back to me. I do not want you to go at all."

"Life is very sad," said Elfrieda.

"You do not love me, or you would not leave me."

"I love you more because I am going, because I must go, because something stronger than myself is forcing me to go."

"Oh," he said, much relieved, "I will take care of Aunt Lottie."

"I mean something within myself."

"Something —?"

"I cannot tell you what it is, I hardly know."

"It is Ruhlmann! She has ruined my whole life. I shall never be happy again."

"Some day I shall come back to you."

"Some day?"

"When I have done what I am setting out to do."

"Maybe I will be old, then."

"I shall love you just the same."

"Frieda, you do not know what you have done to me."

"I do, dear, for I have done it to myself. I must go on now, to the end."

"Without me?"

"Without you — now."

They walked into the house, and Billy, with a heavy heart, watched the packing that was going on.

The Sigberts had at last definitely decided to return to Germany, and Mrs. Sigbert was happy.

For many days after Ruhlmann's visit nothing had been talked of in the family but Elfrieda's voice, and the prospects the prima donna had held out to them. Mrs. Sigbert was in a state of ecstasy, tempered with frugality. She had been thrilled by Ruhlmann's glowing words, and dimly saw a way, through her youngest daughter, to the attainment of the great dream of her life. But she was entirely too sensible and prudent to rush blindly into an enterprise that might turn out disastrously. She feared that she could not trust Elfrieda, who, she thought, lacked the seriousness and application of Greta.

While she was in the midst of these perplexities a letter arrived from Berlin that settled all doubts, cleared away all obstacles, and changed the whole current of the lives of all of them.

Madame Ruhlmann wrote that she had been thinking constantly of Efrieda's voice, that she had been haunted by its beauty and unusual quality. It was the voice that she longed to train. Properly guided, Elfrieda should make the greatest Wagnerian singer of the future. After careful consideration she was prepared to make the following offer. She would take Elfrieda into her home as a member of her household, and give her all instruction, free of charge. The family would furnish her clothes and spending money. She was also prepared to increase the offer she had made to Charlotte to become her accompanist. On the completion of Elfrieda's studies she would expect no repayment of any kind. The only condition she would make was that once started Elfrieda would see it through to the end. Madame would not care to embark upon so great an undertaking without this assurance.

Mrs. Sigbert felt that her prayers had been answered. The question that had long agitated the family had been taken from their hands by Providence, and solved. The decision was made instantly. They would return to Germany.

They did not, at first, take seriously Billy's determination to remain behind. They thought it would be shaken, but it increased. His father's estate had been settled, and there was a sum of money in trust for each of the boys, not a large one, but a substantial one. Financially, there was no reason why Billy should not remain in America, to complete his education, and when Mr. Bruch, the guide and counsellor for many years, unexpectedly took his part, the family capitulated. Karl had decided to go back to Germany, and Mr. Bruch, for some reason, approved of this. And so everything was settled.

Charlotte gave her final lessons, and said good bye to all her pupils. Karl and the girls left school, and all were busy with the many affairs that had to be attended to before they could go. But Billy remained at his studies until the day of departure was at hand.

Finally but one more day remained to them. Much of the furniture had been sold. The house was bare, empty, forlorn. The last few meals were eaten in the kitchen, and here Billy, on the afternoon of the last day, but one, burst in upon them, breathlessly, face glowing, eyes shining.

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Sigbert. Charlotte laid down her knife and fork. The girls looked at him wonderingly.

"I am going to Annapolis."

"What!"

"It is true," said Billy, "I have been appointed to the Naval Academy."

"You will be a sailor!" cried poor Mrs. Sigbert. "What would your father say?"

"He would be proud," replied Billy. "He would be glad to have me an officer in the United States Navy."

"An officer?" said Mrs. Sigbert. "That is better."

"Of course."

"It is splendid," said Elfrieda, looking at him with admiration.

"It is what I have always longed to be," said Billy.

"Poof! You have never mentioned it before," said Elfrieda.

"Neither did you ever mention being a singer until Ruhlmann came," retorted Billy.

"I always said I would go on the stage," answered Elfrieda.

"As a dancer, yes."

"It is the same thing."

"Yes," Billy replied, "I see it now. I am that way myself. I hardly knew what I was longing to do until this came to me, and then I saw in a moment that this was what I had been dreaming of. I understand you now, Elfrieda."

Elfrieda flashed at him a look full of significance. She thought: "He will go everywhere, and meet beautiful women, but he will love me always."

"How did it happen?" asked Charlotte.

"At school today. We marched to the hall for the morning exercises, and Mr. Black, the principal, said he had an announcement to make. One of the boys in the fourth class had won an appointment to the Naval Academy. He had been selected for standing in his studies and other qualifications. And then he introduced Congressman Marshfield."

"I never heard of him," said Mrs. Sigbert, suspiciously.

"He is a great man," said Billy, enthusiastically. "He represents this district in Congress, at Washington. He made a speech, a corker, all about Bunker Hill, and Valley Forge, and Yorktown, and Manila Bay, oh, he did n't forget anything. He talked about an hour. And then he said he was going to send one of the boys to Annapolis, and just when I was wondering if it would be Neil Lawson I saw that everybody was looking at me, so then they called my name again, and I stood up, feeling sort of queer, you know, and they made me go up on the platform and make a speech."

"Make a speech!" cried Elfrieda.

"Oh, I did n't make much of a speech," admitted Billy. "Everybody clapped, so I said I would always do my duty and never make any of my friends ashamed of me, and then I started to walk off. Mr. Marshfield called to me to know if I would accept the appointment."

"What did you say?" asked Mrs. Sigbert.

"Well," said Billy, "I was sort of flustered, and I just said, 'You bet your life,' and everybody laughed. And Mr. Marshfield shook hands with me, and patted me on the back, and said I was one of his boys and that he would keep his eye on me, and for me to let him know if I ever wanted anything. He 's a great man, Mr. Marshfield is. You should have seen how glad he was to meet me. And he has the brightest twinkle in his eye I ever saw."

"Well, well!" said Mrs. Sigbert, vigorously polishing one of the old pans, that was going to be left behind, "and everybody was there?"

"All the school, and Mr. Bruch was on the platform."

"Adolph Bruch?"

"Yes. He was with Mr. Marshfield, and they went away together."

"I would not have accepted it," said Karl, enviously.

"You would so."

"I would not."

"That 's because you could n't get it."

"Here, now," cried Karl, "you shan't say that. It is because I am going back to Germany."

"You 've simply got to see Margaretha, have n't you, Karl?" said Billy, tauntingly.

Karl made a rush for him.

"Tin-types!" said Billy. Karl stopped, and his face turned red.

"Confound you, Wilhelm."

"I did n't mean it, Karl. I don't blame you." He thought, "Karl will see Margaretha, but I shall not see Elfrieda again for a long time, perhaps I shall never see her again." He looked at her, and saw that she was thinking the same thing. He ran from the room, choking back the tears.

The family left the next morning on the long journey to Berlin, and because he was older, then, than when his father had died, it was the saddest day of his life. Elfrieda cried when he kissed her good bye, on the platform of the train that took them all away, and he saw that her eyes were no longer purple, nor even violet, but a drab, colorless gray.

He went to Neil Lawson's house, where it had been arranged that he should stay for a few days, and then took a train himself, one morning, a train that carried him to Annapolis, and into a new life.

For four years, then, every week, a letter went to Berlin, and now and then one came to him from her. Elfrieda was on the thorny, rocky road that leads to fame, and she was footsore and weary. She told him little about herself, except that her star was beckoning her on, and that the end was not in sight. He kept her letters, every one, and sometimes the gaps between them would be months in length. On his midshipman cruise they touched at Kiel, where Karl was in the Naval School, and they went up together to Berlin.

The Sigberts lived in the Charlottenburg quarter, on the edge of the *Tiergarten,* in one of the city's newest apartment houses, a six-story, twin building, with an arching entrance leading into a little courtyard. They had a seven-room flat on the third *étage.* They were very comfortable, and happy with their piano, their music, and their cat. Mrs. Sigbert was contented, serene, and hopeful. The girls had been homesick at first, but that was wearing off, now, and while they did not like Germany as well as they had thought they would while they were in America, still, it was good enough. After all, their work was everything.

He had but one day, and spent it with Elfrieda. They walked under the trees in the *Tiergarten,* had midday breakfast at the *Tiergarten* restaurant, and spent the afternoon on a bench, under the lindens. And then he went back to his ship. Elfrieda loved him, but her music came first. The family had built their hopes on her, and she had promised Ruhlmann to stay until the end. She must go on — without him. Billy understood, and he would try to bear it, like a man. The sea called to him, and he answered, and the years slipped by.

CHAPTER VII

THE CALL ACROSS THE SEA

Mrs. Winters sat on the gallery of the bachelors' mess of the Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank, at Hong Kong, the centre of an admiring group. It was the tiffin hour.

Off across the rooftops of the business section the slanting sun beat down upon the Chinese quarter of the green and golden town.

In the harbor, choked with shipping, half a dozen warships rode at their buoys, heavy, immovable, dressed in battle gray. In-shore two old French gunboats tugged at their hawsers. Beyond them lay a British bulldog, business-like, on guard. There was a Japanese cruiser a little farther out, and at the head of the line, nearest Ly-Mun Pass, a great slate-colored monster, broadside on. From the flagstaff at her stern floated the Stars and Stripes.

Mrs. Winters sipped her tea, and basked in the adoration of the crowd of white-clad young fellows gathered about her table.

Nobody knew how old Corrie Winters was. She had systematically deceived herself about her age for so many years that she had lost the count of her own birthdays. Her last had happened ten years before, an accident thereafter carefully guarded against. A man would have said she was somewhere between twenty-three and thirty; a woman, who watches another woman's throat more closely than she does her eyes, might have been a little more exact, and raised the maximum five, or even ten years.

The men she held under the spell of her feminine charms, and she carried a full and complete line of them, were hardly more than boys. Raleigh was the Executive Officer of the American warship lying at anchor beneath the town. The others were Lieutenant-Commanders, Lieutenants, and infant Ensigns.

Mrs. Winters adored men, but she liked them best when they were of the romantic age and amenable to discipline. To be her admirer was to be her slave.

Fresh of skin as a girl, groomed like a racehorse, gowned a good six months ahead of the mode, Mrs. Winters was a thoroughbred. The white embroidered batiste dress she wore was so simple in its lines that only an artist could have duplicated it. The mesh bag she carried was gold. Her lorgnette was jewelled. On her fingers were a few beautiful stones, uniquely set.

A widow for ten years of such freedom as she had not known while she was married, and which was the breath of her life, her source of livelihood was as much a mystery to her friends as to her enemies.

Bob Winters had been in the foreign commercial service for years, and had dragged his wife from Boma, on the Congo, to Cairo, on the Nile, around the map and back again, but the rolling consul gathers no moss. Yet she toiled not, neither did she spin.

She was a migratory American, having no more permanent habitat than a poker chip, but rested her wings from time to time at the cross-roads of the far-flung world. One took her to the cricket match at Shanghai today, and sat next her at the Army and Navy game six weeks later. She would be the last to say good bye in Paris, and the first to extend a greeting at the Waldorf. If one succeeded after five years of effort in penetrating the Forbidden City in disguise, and suddenly turned the corner of a remote court in an obscure street and met Mrs. Winters in Redfern's latest, one would simply thrust out a friendly hand, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to be in that particular place at that precise time. One would receive one of her picture cards, postmarked "Melbourne," in the morning mail, and bump into her on Pennsylvania avenue at four o'clock that afternoon. Her mind was a composite time-table and bridge score.

Mrs. Winters purred like an over-fed cat, stretching herself delicately in the sunlight. It was warm, and the conversation lagged. They had talked of everything, except the one thing uppermost in the minds of everybody, and that was, would the United States get into the war? After a long pause Hollister said:

"Where 's Billy Hartmann?"

There was an awkward silence.

"I have seen very little of him," said Prothero, one of the junior officers of H.M.S. *Norwich*. "Confound it, Hartmann is pro-German. The dear old top has gone dotty in the crumpet."

His voice was pitched in an injured tone. It was as though he had encountered an indubitable fact that his mind could not grasp.

There was the faintest possible movement of Mrs. Winters' eyebrows.

"His people are German, are n't they?" asked Hollister.

"I believe so; it 's a German name."

"I should n't have cared if it had been anybody else but Billy Hartmann," Prothero continued. "We have been like brothers."

Mrs. Winters, who had been flirting with a boy young enough to have been her son, turned to listen.

"You 've known him for years, have n't you, Proth?" she queried.

"We 've been together nearly everywhere. If I were ordered to Zanzibar I should n't any more than get my mudhooks down before I should look around for Hartmann. He invariably shows up. We 've seen a lot of service together on this station. You remember the time I went down to clean out that nest of pirates in Torres? An old tub of a gunboat poked her nose out of the dawn one morning, and sure enough, it was Hartmann. He was in command of her. It was n't any of his business, but the doctor on my scow was working overtime — and I borrowed a few men from Billy. Of course, he went along to see the fun. The beggars nearly got him. Dirty beasts, all sorts of renegades."

"Shot him?" asked Mrs. Winters, her eyes sparkling.

"Clean through," said Prothero. "The fight was simply topping. We patched him up, and there never was any report about it. So you see how I feel. I should n't care if he 'd keep his confounded views to himself."

"He thinks he has a mission to inflict them on others," said Raleigh. "That 's the German in him. We cut out the war talk in our mess long ago. I have n't heard Hartmann say much lately."

"He used to feel pretty strongly about it," said Hollister.

"I can't say that I blame him," said Raleigh. "His folks live in Germany, his brother was killed in the Jutland battle, and you must admit that 's tough. He got a cable about it at Manila."

"A cable from Germany?" asked Prothero, interested.

"From somebody in the States, who had heard about it, I think."

"Of course it 's beastly, and all that sort of thing, but then — " Prothero got up suddenly, and walked into the club. They understood. Prothero had lost a brother, one of the first hundred thousand.

"Hang it," said Raleigh, "I suppose a fellow has a right to be pro-German if he wants to be. What I can't understand is why he should want to be."

"He is the handsomest man I have ever known, but one," said Mrs. Winters, reminiscently, staring off across the harbor with a dreamy look in her green-gray eyes. "In hips and shoulders I have never seen his superior, and he has adorable legs. His eyes are a trifle too small and too close set."

" I never noticed that," said Raleigh.

" You are not a woman. Is he really so pro-German ? " She bent forward, interested.

" One of the worst I ever heard," said Hollister. " There was a time, when the war first began, when he could have edited a German newspaper. You never listened to such arguments. He was in my class at Annapolis, the youngest man in the class. We thought he had brains, and I cherished that opinion through all the years of service I saw with him, and you do come to know a man on shipboard. When the war broke out — well, you know what these German apologists are. Discussing a question of morality and decency with them is like trying to debate abstract knowledge with a flea. You can't hold them down to anything. There is no logic in them."

Mrs. Winters looked at her wrist watch, and found that she must go. Six eager young gentlemen looked at their wrist watches and made the same discovery. They escorted her to her hotel, bearing her parasol, her fan, her various traps and accoutrements.

The men on the gallery watched her go, and sighed. There was a long silence, while Raleigh ordered the drinks. Then said little Wallis, who was tongue-tied in the presence of beautiful women :

" I don't think that Billy Hartmann is pro-German."

" Wallis," observed Raleigh witheringly, " has a mind like a weather prophet. He finds out what everybody thinks the weather will be, and then coppers the bet. Did you ever agree with anybody, about anything, in your life, Wallie? "

" All the same, I don't think that Billy Hartmann is pro-German," insisted Wallis, doggedly.

" If he is n't a pro-German why does he talk like one? "

" He does n't," said Wallis. " He has n't talked pro-German for months. You fellows thought you were hurting his feelings, and when the arguments began running pretty high you agreed to drop the subject. I 've been confidential with Hartmann lately, and he has n't talked pro-German to me."

" Now you 've said something, Wallis," admitted Raleigh, wagging his head. " You score one point. If a man is pro-German he can't help talking."

" Moreover I don't believe that Hartmann ever was really what you would call pro-German," said Wallis. " I think he was broken-hearted over the whole business, and tried to make excuses. There 's his brother, killed in action, and then, well, he gets letters from a girl in Berlin, and you know what that means."

" Romance. You interest me."

" That 's all I know, except that he has to write a hundred to get one in reply."

" Evidently she does n't like him so well as — as another lady I could mention," grinned Hollister.

" Maybe that 's it," said Wallis. " I remember — it was four or five years ago, when we were in the Mediterranean. She was in Milan, and Hartmann took his leave and went up to see her. He had told me about her, some. When he came back he was like a dead man. I never saw such a look in anybody's eyes. He volunteered nothing, and I asked no questions, but I think I guessed. I suppose I should n't have said anything, but I don't think you understand him."

" Well, he 's a good officer, I 'll say that for him," said Raleigh, who was a disciplinarian.

" One of the best sailormen in all the seven seas," admitted Prothero, who had come back, and was listening. " I shall go out to see him tonight, to say good bye. You are tearing yourselves away from us tomorrow? "

" Homeward bound! We sail at ten," grinned Raleigh.

" God! I envy you," said Prothero slowly. " My folks have used all the pull the family can muster to have me transferred to the fleet. I 'm dying for a whiff of that fishy North Sea smell, and — It 's no use; here I stick."

"You 've done your bit, give someone else a chance," laughed Raleigh.

"It 's all well enough for you to talk," answered the Englishman. "You 're going home, and unless I am no prophet there 'll be something topping for you."

"That is on the knees of the gods," replied the American discreetly. "I don't know what may be in store for me," he added. "Hartmann, Wallis, and Hollister are under orders to report at once at Washington. The rest of us won't know where we are going until we arrive at 'Frisco, unless we get something by radio on the way across."

Prothero arose to go. "Well, you know what I would like to say," he said simply. "I 'll call this evening."

"We dine at seven," smiled Raleigh.

"Thanks, I 'll be there — and say good bye to Hartmann. Too bad he should have avoided me so lately."

"He 's studying a great deal," little Wallis hastened to explain.

"Studying what?" asked Raleigh.

"Oh, tactics, and strategy, everything. He 's a regular grind, and you 'd be surprised to see how far he 's gone along some lines. He 's 'way past the text books, working out problems of his own that he 's invented. I 'd like to see him in manœuvres."

"I 'd like to see us all in manœuvres," said Raleigh bitterly.

"He 's got some sort of a war-game board that he 's made himself," went on Wallis. "It takes up the whole of his stateroom. I 've seen it. We 've worked together some. That 's how I 've found out how sensitive he is. He thinks he 's rather in the way in the wardroom country because he 's German. I don't blame him. Everybody stops talking when he shows up, and the conversation is switched to something else. Things are better now, but they used to be pretty bad. I know, that 's why I don't think Hartmann is pro-German."

"What would you rather do than to argue that black is white, Wallie?" laughed Hollister.

"It 's his liver," said Raleigh.

"It 's my common sense," grinned Wallis. "You don't know anything about psychology, that 's all."

Prothero left. At the cable office he met Mrs. Winters, who was just going in.

"Dreadfully smelly place, that, Proth," she smiled; "won't you file this for me?"

He took the message from her hand, left it with the man at the desk, rejoined her, and walked back with her to her hotel. If he had happened to have read it he would have discovered that it was addressed to Hannibal G. White, Valparaiso, and that it said simply: " Sell hundred shares Copiapo."

It might have interested him, as an officer of the British navy, if he had known that the message was relayed from Valparaiso to New York, that it crossed the ocean to Stockholm, and was transmitted thence to Berlin, and that eventually it was handed to a snug-looking little man in the Foreign Office, who first consulted a book which he took from his safe, and then smiled grimly as he read it; and he would have been even more interested if he had known that the little man touched a button upon his desk, and that two hours later a big, blonde, bearded man with a hastily packed suitcase in his hand took the express for Kiel, but that is what happened.

The bearded man boarded a long, gray-mottled submarine that thereupon headed northwest through the Cattegat into the North Sea. Then she submerged, and nosed along the coast of Norway, cleared the north coast of Scotland between the Hebrides and the Faroe Islands, dodging mines that she could not see and could not feel, taking a chance with destiny in the dark, cold waters washing south from Iceland. She headed around the north coast of Ireland, fifty miles off shore in a hundred fathoms, and clear then of the mine fields, laid a course straight across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. MONSON READS A LETTER

The first thing Lieut.-Commander Hartmann did when he reached Washington was to report at the Navy Department.

The next thing he did was to write to Elfrieda, as he had done once every week for many years, although he knew there was little hope of the letter reaching her.

It was not the kind of letter he would have written at a happier time. He told her that he was in Washington, that he was well, and that he loved her, as he had loved her from the time he had first seen her. He posted the letter in a mail box on the corner, took a walk, dined alone, and went alone to a theatre, for he was hungry for amusement. He returned to the club at 11 o'clock, and went to bed, at about the time that Elfrieda's letter was being opened and read by Mr. Monson, a quiet and inoffensive looking middle-aged gentleman connected with the United States Secret Service.

As Billy was driving his right arm a little farther under the pillow, and settling down for a good night's sleep, Mr. Monson, with the sagacity born of long experience, and the assistance of Mr. Chipman Peters, who was quite an expert in his way, having an uncanny eye for codes and ciphers, was reaching the conclusion that the letter was probably entirely harmless.

"Indiscreet, but that is all so far as I can make out," said Mr. Peters.

Mr. Monson nodded. "He should n't have written that he was in Washington, and he would n't have, if he had been trying to put something over. I hate this spying upon our own officers, Peters. Damn it, can't we trust our own men? Why, these fellows — they will do the fighting for us." He shook his head. "I 'd like to tip this Hartmann off," he said. "He seems a decent sort, very decent. Nice letter, Peters. It 's to his girl. Confound it, he ought to know. It may put him in bad. Damn it, Peters, some other man may get her."

"Cut out the sentiment," growled Peters, "it does n't go in your business."

"Yes, I know," said Monson, "I was only thinking out loud. Still, she must be a nice girl, Peters, to have a man write a letter to her like that, don't you think?"

"How should I know?" said Peters.

"Why, man, you read the letter."

"Bah! It was n't a letter to me; it was a code."

"Well, you could n't find the key."

"I may yet. See here, what do you make of this?"

"Of what?"

Peters handed to him a telegram. It was addressed to Hannibal G. White, 45 Broadway, New York. Monson read it over slowly, in a monotone: "Sell hundred shares Boulder."

"Humph! Unsigned," said Monson. "Woman's handwriting. Very clear, legible handwriting, business-like."

"Yes."

"You still persist in suspecting this Hannibal G. White?"

"I suspect everybody."

"But about White, in particular?"

"His cables to Stockholm make quite a collection in my files."

"New York is still doing considerable business with Stockholm, you know."

"Quite true."

"Have we heard anything from that end?"

"Enough to make it certain that there is a big leakage through Stockholm into Berlin. We have nothing on White yet. This is the first despatch to White from Washington. It was received in New York at 2:08, delivered to White in say, fifteen minutes. At 3:01 White sent the following cable to his Stockholm branch: 'Sales 26487.'"

"What does this White do?" asked Monson.

"Wood pulp and paper stocks, and a small brokerage business."

"Well, it's a case for the British branch, if there's anything in it. Have you communicated with them?"

"Of course — and maybe you are right, but I am thinking that it will soon be a case for us."

Monson fingered the telegram Peters had handed to him. "Who sent this?"

"A Mrs. Winters. This is the original from the Western Union. Presumably in her handwriting. I wanted a sample of it. We may need it. She sent several other telegrams at the same time. That is how I identified this one."

"Did you get them?"

"Copies."

"Let me see them."

Peters spread them out upon the desk, and Monson read them over, a word at a time:

HARWICH AND SONS,
Thirty-eighth Street and Broadway, New York.

Send both gowns immediately care Summit, Washington. Letter follows.

MRS. C. H. WINTERS.

" The lady wants her new dresses, and must have them," commented Mr. Monson. " Next."

CAPT. WALTER T. FARQUHAR, U.S.A.,
Fort D. A. Russell, Cheyenne, Wyo.

Disgusted find you stationed such beastly hole. Shall I have you transferred East? Answer.

CORRIE.

" The lady hath pull," chuckled Mr. Monson.

" And push," observed Peters drily. " Read this one:"

MCQUARRIE CONSTRUCTION CO.,
Ninth and Chestnut streets, Philadelphia, Pa.

Splendid opening American construction company Hong Kong. Would you entertain business proposition? Wire appointment.

CORRIE H. WINTERS.

" One more?" asked Monson, bored. He read:

Mrs. Richard Brainerd Sabiston,
Namaschet, Mass.

Delighted accept invitation, please wire your convenience.

Corrie Harding Winters.

" Smart woman," said Monson. " She 's covered the whole range, business, romance, society. I 'll bet you a dinner she has this Farquhar transferred to Governor's Island and builds a sky-scraper in Hong Kong. Sound like perfectly natural, normal, straight-forward telegrams to me. Smart woman."

" All plain enough except the last one. Somehow that 's the one that interests me."

" Look here, Peters," said Monson, " if there were anything wrong she never would have sent these telegrams along with the one to White. She 'd have put that one over incog."

" If people never slipped up where would we be? " asked Peters. " The smartest of them make mistakes. I may be of a suspicious nature, but all the same I am interested in this Mrs. Sabiston. Namaschet, Mass. Let 's see, that is down on Cape Cod, is n't it? "

" Not so far down as that," replied Monson.

" Well, it 's on the sea, anyhow."

"Sure." Monson crossed the room, found a time-table in the rack, and skimmed the pages. "Here it is," he said, "about an hour from Boston, on the South shore between Boston and Plymouth."

"Some day," said Peters, on his way to the door, "I shall be buying a ticket to Namaschet; I feel it in my bones."

"If you ever get caught down there in one of those East winds you'll feel it in your bones," laughed Monson, "and anyhow, we can't spare you for these wild goose chases. You're learning too much about the code stuff."

"I'm thinking of cutting that out," replied Peters, wrinkling up his forehead. "I like the outside work better. More doing."

"You stick to your job and you'll be famous."

"Famous and unknown. Well, anyhow, Monson, find out what you can about Winters. I'm really interested."

He went out, and Monson deposited Elfrieda's letter in the filing case, under the H's, along with more intimate details about Lieut.-Commander William Hartmann, U.S.N., than that slumbering gentleman knew about himself.

The clock struck one as he went back and sat down at his desk, which was a coincidence, for at that precise instant, Corrie, who had just returned to her apartment from a dinner and a bridge, was picking up from her dressing table a letter from the pile of mail which she had left there earlier in the evening, in the haste of getting away to her engagement. The envelope was plain, but the letter within was written on the stationery of Mr. Hannibal G. White, of 45 Broadway, New York. It read:

> MY DEAR MRS. WINTERS:
>
> Thank you so much for your interest in my friend. I was wondering if you could n't help to obtain a good detail for him, something, for instance, such as Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief. I think it would be splendid. You will find my check enclosed.

Corrie glanced at the check, and smiled with satisfaction. She lighted a cigarette, and smoked it, her eyes half closed. Presently she went to the telephone, asked for a number, and stood waiting impatiently, while the cigarette burned to her fingers. At last her face brightened.

"Are you there, Senator?" she asked into the receiver. "This is Mrs. Winters. Yes, thanks, I reached home safely. Senator, I 've been thinking, and I want you to do something for me. Why could n't Billy Hartmann be made —" she glanced at the letter on her dressing table — "Assistant

Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief? Is n't that an adorable idea? I 'm not certain, but I think he has enough rank for it. Oh, yes, I 'm sure he 'd like it. Thank you, Senator, good night."

Then she went to bed, smiling.

CHAPTER IX

WAITING ORDERS

Billy turned over and yawned, and stretched himself luxuriously. Liberty like this was good, after so many months at sea, and he meant to enjoy it. He took another nap, overslept himself, and it was nearly twelve o'clock when, after his bath and shave, he dressed himself leisurely and went down to breakfast.

He was half-way across the room when he looked up from the headlines he had been scanning, and saw Mrs. Winters and little Wallis lunching tête-à-tête in the cosiest corner. They beckoned to him joyously, and he went over and joined them, Mrs. Winters regarding him, as he crossed the room with the swift stride that only the long-limbed use, with a critical and approving eye.

Like most men, in both branches of the service, Billy liked to get into citizen's clothes whenever he could, and like most soldiermen, and some sailormen, he looked remarkably well in them. Not even Mrs. Winters, who could detect the slightest physical flaw in a man at a single glance, found fault with him, and there was something more than the passing whim of the moment in the warm touch of her soft fingers as she patted the long-fingered, sinewy hand he held out to her. He had known Mrs. Winters too long to feel the slightest surprise at seeing her. It was the most natural thing in the world for her to be lunching at the club.

He had grown into a tall man, straight and tough as a spar. Blonde, but not too blonde, with dark blue eyes that could cut like a chisel and a fair, clear skin, he was colored by the wind that sweeps a deck across an open sea to a pink-bronze shade that is vastly different from the beach sunburn of a landsman. He had a good, strong nose, high in the bridge, and a mouth that was open only when he spoke.

" Sit down, Billy," commanded Mrs. Winters.

He drew up a chair, while Wallis called a waiter, and recommended the chops and corn muffins.

" It 's good to see you again, dear boy," purred Mrs. Winters. " You kept yourself so close at Hong Kong I scarcely caught a glimpse of you. When did you get in, how long shall you be here, and where are you going? "

" Yesterday. As for the rest, I don't know. I 'm waiting orders."

Wallis looked as though he had intended to speak, but he gulped bashfully instead, and abandoned the effort. He had been about to remind Mrs. Winters that she knew when Billy had arrived in Washington, because she had called him up at the club the day before, and he had told her that they had both reached town that morning.

" What do you want to do ? " asked Mrs. Winters.

" What does any man want to do ? " he smiled. " I want active service, of course." He spread out the paper, and showed her the headlines. " Beginning to look serious, is n't it ? "

" Do you really think we are going to have war, Billy ? " Mrs. Winters leaned across the table toward him, and in her green-gray eyes there suddenly shone a more serious light than he remembered ever to have seen in them. He had looked into Mrs. Winters' eyes, which were famous on four continents, many times before, and had seen in them only — other things. Now for the first time he beheld anxiety and concern. " Do you really think so, Billy ? " she repeated, bending over so close to him that he could feel her warm breath upon his cheek.

" Of course," said Billy, " it 's inevitable, and has been for a long time."

" Do you think that Germany will fight ? "

" She 's forcing us to fight her. She 's been fighting us for a long time," he answered. Little Wallis, glad of an opportunity to get into the conversation, wagged his head vigorously, and subsided.

Mrs. Winters' memory flashed back across the Pacific, to the club gallery at Hong Kong, to the conversation about Hartmann she had heard there on her last afternoon, to the cablegram she had sent to Valparaiso.

" She 's forcing us to fight her ! " That sentence, that had come from Hartmann's lips so vigorously and naturally, repeated itself over and over again in her brain like the tantalizing refrain of the latest tango waltz. She flashed a quick glance at him, then turned her head, and sat staring out of window, so that she did not see the party of young naval officers who entered at that moment, and took a table that was screened from where they sat by a bank of palms. They had evidently been having an argument, which they resumed. Suddenly a man's voice said :

" Nevertheless and notwithstanding, I don't want to go into action under a Prussian."

" Don't get worked up about it," laughed another voice, the voice of an older man, " you won't have to."

" I 'm not so sure of that," insisted the first. " Take Billy Hartmann, for example."

"Is Billy Hartmann a Prussian?"

"Look him up in the Register."

"I have served with him for years, and I never knew that."

"We don't know lots of things, and we have forgotten others, but we are beginning to remember them, now. Billy Hartmann was born in Germany."

"I knew he had a German name, but I supposed he was born here."

"Well, he was n't, and what are you going to do about it? I tell you, it 's serious business. And Billy Hartmann is n't the only one. I mention him because we all know him, and like him."

"He 's always been one of us. Confound it, man, he 's as good an American as any of us," said another voice. Mrs. Winters was squirming. Billy sat doggedly cutting his chop.

"Just the same he 's a Prussian," insisted the man who had spoken at first. "I think the decent thing for all of them to do, at a time like this, is to recognize that the situation is embarrassing and offer to step aside."

"Resign?"

"Not necessarily. Oh, no, not resign. I think they should ask for service where — well, where nobody would be — you know what I mean. 'Put none but Americans on guard tonight!' That's my motto."

"That's what I say," said another voice. "My ancestors — "

"Now, we know all about your ancestors, Hollister. We've got 'em catalogued. Forget 'em." Another voice had taken up the conversation. "What difference does it make whether your ancestors came over in the *Mayflower* or the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse?*"

"It's going to make a lot of difference when this war comes."

"It ought not to, and I don't believe it will. We're all immigrants — and we're here because we're here. We can't ask every chap with a German name to intern himself for the war. We need every officer we've got — and then some. As for Billy Hartmann, why, man, he's one of the best strategists in the service."

"He has the reputation in the British navy," admitted Hollister, "of being the best strategist we have."

"I don't mean to say anything against Billy Hartmann," interjected the first voice. "He is without exception one of the finest men I ever knew. And he is strong in strategy and in tactics. But what good would it do us if — if in a pinch —

if on the final show-down — he had a soft spot in his heart for — It means something to be born in a country. I don't believe you ever get over it."

There was silence for a moment. Billy was looking straight before him, and he was smiling, but his cheeks were red. Mrs. Winters had risen nobly to many occasions, but she could not rise to this one. Little Wallis started from his chair, and Billy motioned him back.

" However, so far as Billy Hartmann is concerned," resumed a voice at the next table, " you can calm your anxieties. He has n't enough rank for command, except, of course, that he might command a division of four destroyers. But he could n't command the fleet."

" Yes, but he could, and that 's just the point. Do you know that Hartmann has been made Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief ? "

" Has that been decided on ? "

" Everybody at the Department has it." Mrs. Winters abandoned every pretence of not listening.

" That should n't have been announced."

" Who 's keeping secrets at the Department now ? " asked a husky, disgusted voice that had not joined in the conversation before. " I 'll answer it — nobody."

" Well, Hartmann is Assistant Chief-of-Staff, then, and the fleet goes into action, and he 's in the flag conning tower with the Admiral and the Chief-of-Staff, do you get me? Well, a fragment of shell, the first shell fired, we 'll say, enters the conning tower, and kills the Admiral and the Chief-of-Staff. Are you following me? Hartmann is n't killed. Now of course he *could* notify the Captain of the flagship — but he would n't have to, and there would be no way for anybody to know unless he did. He could stay in that conning tower and give every signal, every order to the fleet. The plan of battle would be his to make. He would hold the destiny of the American republic in the hollow of his hands — and the fleet opposing him would be the fleet of his Fatherland."

"By Jove!" A very deep-voiced man suddenly boomed out. "And the German fleet might even be commanded by Hartmann's brother."

"What!"

"Hartmann has a brother in the German navy."

"I 've heard that, too," said another. "Something peculiar about it, as I recall it. What was it, now? It was when we were on our first midshipman cruise. We touched at Kiel — and Billy Hartmann brought his brother to lunch, and — I have it, I remember all about it. It was a twin brother, the living image of Billy."

"There, do you get that?" said the man who had been the first to speak. "Here 's Billy Hartmann in the flag conning tower, and here 's the German fleet coming out of the fog, commanded by his twin brother. Of course, his brother may not be commanding the German fleet."

"No," interjected Hollister, "his brother is dead, lost in the Jutland fight. I heard them talking about it at Hong Kong."

"That 's not the point, it 's the principle of the thing."

"Good God! I had n't thought of that," said another voice.

"It 's time you did think of it. The men are sulking about it. Waldron has a great way of finding out what the gun deck is thinking. He told me. They 're superstitious. They don't want to go into battle under any Prussians, and that 's all there is to it, and I don't blame them. And mark my words, the country will be sitting up and taking notice before long."

"You forget that the German fleet can't get out. Don't overlook the British fleet," laughed some one.

"We may not have that to depend upon always. We may have to look out for ourselves some day, and that 's the day I 'm thinking of."

Billy could stand no more. He felt as though he were choking, as though every drop of blood in his body had ebbed away. He gave Mrs. Winters his hand, nodded at Wallis, who smiled encouragingly at him, and walked out. Wallis waited until he had got away, then leaped to his feet and burst through the palms.

"My God!" he cried, "Hartmann was sitting here all the time."

"Billy Hartmann! Why did n't you tell us?"

"Tell you? I was frozen." He went back to Mrs. Winters, and took her away, voluble for the first time in his life in the presence of a good-looking woman.

"Think of the insult of it," he said. "It will kill him. He 's as sensitive as a girl." He babbled on.

"What was it they said Billy had been appointed," she asked, "Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief? Yes, that was it." She was looking off across the park, and had completely forgotten Wallis.

That afternoon Mr. Peters took into Mr. Monson, and laid upon that romantic gentleman's desk, a telegram addressed to Mr. Hannibal G. White, of 45 Broadway, New York. It read:

"Sell hundred shares Ankorite."

CHAPTER X

ADDED ATTRACTION — MLLE. FRALLI

Billy had instructions to report at the Department at two, so there was still an hour for him to pull himself together.

He headed south, blindly, not knowing where he was going, entered the grounds back of the White House, and turned into the ellipse. This brought him out on the Speedway, and he was soon at the river, where he walked on the seawall, all alone, until he felt that he had himself under control. He kept his appointment punctually, and learned officially of his assignment as Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief.

" God is good to me in some things," he thought; " I shall be with the fleet."

He knew that an older man, with more rank, might have a greater claim to this post, but if his value were recognized, so much the better for him. He was to remain in Washington for the present, awaiting orders. He left the building, walking on air.

Billy thought of the day when Mr. Black had come down to the front of the platform to inform the school that one of the boys had been appointed to an Annapolis cadetship, and how proud he had been when he had been called up by the principal to make a speech. Not since that day of his youth had he known such exhilaration of soul as he now felt. He would be with the North Atlantic fleet, and if Fate were kind he would go into action, not a wretched brush with a handful of miserable Chinese and Malay pirates, or West Indian revolutionists, but the real thing, the thing that every man in the navy had dreamed of, and had wondered about, and worked and planned towards. He crossed the street, skipping like a boy, turned into the Avenue, under the monster elms that were beginning to respond to the soft caresses of approaching spring, and strode along by the high iron fence that stands guard around the home of the President.

Ahead of him was a little man in a black overcoat and a black slouch hat. There was something very familiar about the neck and shoulders, and upon passing him, and turning to take a side-long glance at him, Billy was not surprised to find that he knew him. It was Mr. Marshfield, a trifle stouter, a bit more bald, decidedly grayer. The hair that showed beneath his hat was, in fact, quite white; but his eye still had the whimsical, humorous twinkle, and his hand-clasp was as warm and friendly as it had been in the old days. Billy found himself believing, as he did on the first day he had ever seen Mr. Marshfield, that he was the one person in the whole world whom Mr. Marshfield would rather see and shake hands with above all others. His heart warmed to him as he caught step.

"This is a delightful surprise, Mr. Marshfield," Billy smiled. "I did n't expect to meet you in Washington."

Mr. Marshfield regarded him with astonishment. He seemed hurt, even offended. It was a new sensation for him to discover that there was anybody on earth who did n't expect to meet Ben Marshfield in Washington.

"I 'm here practically all the time, nowadays," he said, and helped himself to a fresh cigar, throwing the old one through the iron bars.

"I beg your pardon," said Billy, declining a cigar from the proffered case. "It seems to me I heard that you had been defeated for Congress, some years ago, and I supposed you had retired from politics."

"They gerrymandered me out of my old district, dad-blame 'em, so I tried for the other end of the

Capitol, and finally landed. Been there two years," explained Mr. Marshfield.

"I 've been at sea nearly three," said Billy. "That accounts for my ignorance. I had wondered if you would remember me after all these years."

"I never forget anybody I 've done a favor for," laughed Senator Marshfield. "Slow up, son, those are long legs of yours. Besides, it has n't been so many years." It was as if some one had accused him of being old. There was nothing that Mr. Marshfield resented so much as the imputation that by any possibility the years could be telling upon him. It was his one feminine trait. "Don't forget anybody. I 've kept my eye on you ever since you entered the Academy."

"I shall never be able to repay you for what you have done for me," said Billy; "you gave me my start."

"You 're one of my boys," laughed the Senator. "Never forget my boys. I 've watched your career, read a lot about you, and I 'm glad you 're getting along so well. This new assignment of yours is a big thing. Make the most of it."

"My assignment?" stammered Billy. "I did n't know that you had heard about that. I supposed it was merely known in the service."

Senator Marshfield chuckled. His face glowed with the warmth of mirth. His beady little eyes fairly danced.

"I fixed it," he said, patting Billy's shoulder. They had turned into the Avenue again. Ahead of them the great dome of the Capitol stood out, a white sentinel of liberty, against the arching blue.

"You fixed it?" Billy's voice in spite of himself was incredulous. He knew that Congressman Marshfield had given to him, unasked, one of the prizes in the world, and he had always regarded that as one of the remarkable things of life not to be accounted for by any mere mortal. But that he could do this thing, even though he was now a Senator, seemed so stupendous that it dazed him. He stopped, and looked at the Senator in amazement.

"Sure I fixed it, Hartmann," laughed the Senator heartily. "Now, don't overwhelm me with your gratitude. I know it 's a big thing for you, and of course I always like to do things for my own boys. But this appointment of yours was so obviously the proper one to make that it was, as you might say, practically inevitable. It 's the best appointment that could possibly have been made."

Billy's face turned the color of a red brick wall. He tried to say something, to express the thoughts that came crowding to his mind. He had worked, he had studied, he had given to the navy, which was all he had in the world, his days and nights, his whole life, everything. He had tried the best he could to be worthy of the opportunity that had come to him so wonderfully, the chance to stay in America, to make Elfrieda his, some day; and when that hope had finally been abandoned, he had clung to the navy itself as a symbol. If what he had given was understood and appreciated, he was content. He stammered brokenly something of what he felt.

" Best possible," insisted Senator Marshfield, as though some one had argued the point with him. " Smartest political appointment that could have been made. No chance in the navy for many of them."

" Sir! "

" Absolutely."

" Political? I thought — "

" Why, boy, don't you see," said Senator Marshfield, drawing Billy's arm through his own, " it 'll have a tremendous political effect. It 'll just about cinch the German-American vote. Of course, there 's a lot of wild clamor against the Germans now, but after the war we 'll have to live with them — and we 'll need them."

Billy's tongue slipped down his throat, and he could n't find it.

"I asked your appointment as a personal favor — I'm on the Naval Committee — see? It'll tickle 'em out home. That name Hartmann will fetch 'em. They'll like the idea of our trusting a man with that kind of a name in an important post. You see, son, the fight for the next House is going to be about the most important political contest this country has seen since the Civil War. It may determine the complexion of the Government for fifty years. If the cards are played right the party in power will stay in. The Allies are going to win the war, of course. Germany is a gone coon. When it is over we don't want any German-American grudges settled at the polls. Tickle 'em now whenever it is possible, that's the scheme."

"When did you do this?" Billy asked.

"Nine o'clock this morning. Whenever I get a good idea I never let any grass grow under my feet."

"Did n't the Board pass on it?"

Senator Marshfield chuckled. "It takes the practical politician to cut out the red tape, son," he said. "What we need to do at a time like this is to get down to brass tacks. Well, I guess I'll have to leave you. I had intended to walk down to the Capitol, but I'm tired. It keeps a man busy nowadays getting things for his constituents. A war means lots of patronage, and patronage means work." He whistled for a taxi.

"Good bye, Senator," Billy said, holding out his hand.

"When are you going?" asked Senator Marshfield, shaking it with great cordiality.

"My orders are uncertain. I do not know. I may not see you again, so let me thank you for your interest in me, and for this —" He could not bring himself to finish the sentence.

"Don't thank me, son," laughed Senator Marshfield, lightly, "thank Mrs. Winters."

"Mrs. Winters!"

"She put the idea into my mind. Of course, I might have thought of it myself, in fact somebody else suggested it, too, but Mrs. Winters saw it first. Smart woman."

"I did not know that you knew Mrs. Winters."

"Everybody knows Mrs. Winters," said the Senator. "I'd as soon be dead as not to know her. Charming woman, ideas just shoot from her. She called me up last night, and then, Bruch thought it would be a good thing. You remember him, old friend of the family? I had a letter about it this morning. The rest was easy. Well, good bye, son." He waved farewell from the taxicab.

Billy groaned in spirit. He felt as though he had suddenly gone dead on his feet. He was still standing on the curbstone where the Senator had left him, five minutes later, when somebody came out of the hotel behind him, looked at him closely, and then touched him on the arm.

Billy turned dejectedly, and there was Neil Lawson. He recognized him at once, although it had been years since he had seen him last. He had grown from a clean-cut boy into a quick, active, alert man, a little under size, but as full of snap as a fox terrier, and very good looking.

They shook hands, as men do who have been separated for a long time, and feel the same old thrill of friendship that they knew as boys, upon meeting again. Billy could have hugged him, for he was lonesome and low-spirited. He suggested lunch.

" Too busy packing," said Neil. " I 'll tell you, Billy, you come out to my apartment, and have luncheon with me, and we can talk over old times while I am getting my things together."

" That will suit me splendidly."

" You are still in the navy, of course. I 've read about you now and then. That was a fine thing you did at the time of that revolution in Santo Domingo. When was it, four or five years ago? I can't keep track of the years. They are slipping by, but somehow it seems only yesterday that we were playing ball in the field back of the old school. You have n't changed a bit, Billy, a few more lines of character in your face, but you look the same."

"You are much the same, too. I am certainly glad to see you."

"And Karl — poor old Karl — was killed."

"You heard of it?"

"There was something about him in the papers. I — I know how you feel, Billy."

"Thanks, old man."

"And how are all the Sigberts?"

"I hear from them, now and then. The war must have fallen upon them heavily. Lately the letters have stopped coming."

"Elfrieda, she is well, I hope?"

"Yes, I — I hope so."

"You never married, Billy?"

"No."

"I had thought — Elfrieda — I was sure she would have become a great singer by now."

"There is no short cut to success in opera," said Billy.

"She is still studying?"

"She is still with Ruhlmann."

"Oh — I see."

They got into Lawson's car, that was waiting at the curb, and rode out to the apartment in Seventeenth street, where Neil had a large living room, a bedroom and bath, and a long hallway, lined with books. It was attractively furnished, and comfortable.

"Shall we have lunch here, or in the café?" asked Neil.

"In here, if you would just as soon."

"I prefer it, too." He gave an order over the telephone, mixed a cocktail, and drew a chair up beside Billy, who sat staring into the gas-log.

Luncheon was brought in, and they sat down at a round mahogany table near the window.

"I 'll have some packing to do," Neil said, "but we can talk away, just the same."

"Where are you going?"

"Florida. Aviation school."

"That is fine, Neil."

"I must do something, of course. I thought that was the best thing to go into. It is up-to-date, and modern, and everybody, more or less, will be a novice, at first, and I shall not seem such a dunce. I can run an automobile — it is the only practical thing I do know how to do — and I thought I might manage with an airplane. I had a little political pull, and obtained an appointment to the school."

Billy winced. "Do you have to have pull?" he asked.

"Certainly. It is the royal road to everything, in Washington. I shall probably secure a commission — and break my neck. Well, that is what we are here for. I saw something in the paper about you. I do not understand about it exactly. I hope the detail is a good one."

"Was it in the newspapers?"

"The noon extra."

"It is an important post," said Billy, "I am very happy about it."

"It is splendid, I think, to give a thing like that to a man — You know what I mean, Billy. You were born in Germany, you know."

"You thought of that?"

"Oh, yes, it is great. It shows the world that we are really one people, after all, that we are Americans together."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course."

Billy felt something within him suddenly come to life. He stretched his hand quickly across the table.

"I want to shake hands with you, Neil," he said.

"What is it?"

"You have helped me. The fact is, some people will not like this appointment of mine, I am afraid."

"What people?"

"The folks whose ancestors came over in the *Mayflower*. They forget that these same ancestors of theirs fought two wars against England, and that they themselves were generally anti-English at the time of the Boer War. They think that nobody else could be like that."

Lawson nodded. "Still," he said slowly, "the German-Americans are responsible for whatever feeling against them there may be. They have carried on an outrageous propaganda."

"The subsidized editors and professors have, and they have spilled the beans. The reaction against it among Americans of German descent set in long ago."

"I have an idea that you are right."

"I know it, for that has been my experience. The propagandists over-capitalized the blood instinct. It is strong, but it is n't fool proof. I went part of the distance with them, but there came a time when my brain got the better of my heart. Well, here is one crowd, wanting to throw me out of the navy because I was born in Germany, and another crowd putting me forward for the same reason." He repeated to Neil what Senator Marshfield had told him. "Why can't they take me just as I am?"

Neil's eyes blazed. " I 'd like to serve under you in the navy, Billy," he said warmly.

" That is good of you."

" But I could n't even swab a deck in the navy. The truth is, this war has caught me unprepared."

" You think we shall have war ? "

" I don't see how it can be avoided."

" I agree with you."

" Of course, I want to do something," Neil went on. " I look around, and I find that I am utterly stupid. They can use blacksmiths, and tinners, and bakers, and policemen, and bricklayers, and a cotton spinner can make munitions, but I don't even know how to dig a trench. There is n't a drop of gas in my tank. You don't know, because seamanship is your profession, but to be caught like this, to know that your country needs you, and that you are soft and flabby and downright ignorant of anything useful, and to want to go, and not to know where or how to go, is rotten, just plain rotten. I happened to think of the aviation corps. I went up in a hydroplane at a summer resort one time, and I stretched that aërial flight at the dizzy altitude of eight inches into something that sounded pretty big. I can run a car, and so I got in, and now I 'm going to begin training, I 'm going to start locking my own particular stable door."

"When do you go?"

"This afternoon, at four."

"I am sorry to lose you, but I am glad."

"Shall you be here long?"

"Have n't the remotest idea — indefinitely."

"Where are you stopping?"

"My club."

"Why don't you come in here? I am going to keep it; no telling when they'll be bringing me back on a stretcher, you know. You can have it for as long as you want, and when you go away, simply leave the key with the janitor. I have let my man go, but you can engage the janitor's wife to look after the rooms. You used to play, did n't you?"

"A little," said Billy; "they tried to make me learn."

"Here's the piano and a barrel of music, and books, and things, why not make yourself at home?"

"I can't refuse, Neil, it is too tempting."

"That is fine. You will like Washington. Is this your first visit here?"

"Yes; I have spent nearly my whole life at sea. How do you happen to be living here, Neil?"

"Father left me a little something, you know, and part of it was in Washington real estate. I came down to look after the property, liked the place, stayed around, made some friends, and now I 'm a regular. It is hard to break the Washington habit once you form it."

He was busy with his bags. Finally everything was packed, and they went out together, and Billy went with Neil to the station. Lawson had insisted upon leaving his car for him to use.

Billy drove back to the club to get his steamer trunk and bags. He threw his things together hurriedly, and coming upon a small black leather case, as he was packing, he took that from the trunk where he had found it, and slipped it into his pocket.

Then he returned to the apartment, settled himself, dressed, and went out to dinner.

Billy had met Corrie Winters in a pith helmet on the sun-stricken quay at Aden, without feeling in the least surprised to see her there, and he had said good bye to her in Honolulu, and been welcomed, when he landed at the dock in Nagasaki, by her smiling face, and he had accepted these things as part of the well-ordered scheme of the universe, so he was not in the least astonished, when he stepped into the elevator, to find her beaming upon him.

"Why, Billy! Where in the world have you been?" she wanted to know. "I did n't know that you had friends in the Summit."

" I live here," he smiled.

" Since when, pray ? "

" Just now."

" That 's adorable. So do I. Have a charming little apartment." Her taxi was waiting at the door. " You 'll come to see me tomorow evening ? "

" I 'm afraid I have half an engagement," he pleaded.

" Won't do, you must come."

" I 'll let you know, call you up in the morning."

" Oh," she said, " I nearly forgot — added attraction, Mlle. Fralli."

" I 'm afraid — "

" I shan't take no for an answer, and besides, she 's adorable — and she wants to meet you."

" Never heard of her."

" She has heard of you."

" How do you know ? "

" She said so."

" French ? "

" H — m ! Italian."

" Well — bridge ? "

" Poker."

" All right."

" Good bye."

" So long, Corrie."

CHAPTER XI

A LITTLE TRIP TO NAMASCHET

"I think I shall go to Namaschet," announced Mr. Peters, entering Mr. Monson's room, with an eager light burning in his small, dark eyes, and a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Namaschet? Oh, yes, I remember."

"I said I had a hunch."

"I always act on hunches," commented Mr. Monson; "I can't get over having been a police reporter."

"So do I," said Mr. Peters.

"Anything doing?"

"Several things. Want to listen?"

"Sure."

"I have found out something about Mrs. Winters on my own account; I could n't wait for you."

"I can't do half the big things that demand immediate attention, let alone — "

"Never mind that, now, read this," interrupted Mr. Peters. He laid a telegram on the desk in front of Mr. Monson, who adjusted his spectacles, and read it aloud in the monotonous voice he always used:

Mrs. Richard Brainerd Sabiston,
Namaschet, Mass.

Delighted to have her.

Corrie Harding Winters.

"What do you make of that?" demanded Mr. Peters, his eyes snapping with enjoyment.

"Not a blamed thing."

"Neither do I."

"It does n't code up with anything you have?"

"It is merely a social telegram."

"What the dickens —"

"Now let 's talk for a moment about Hannibal G. White. He has been receiving telegrams, in code, at Valparaiso. I have a file of them. There was one from Hong Kong that interested me." Peters placed a slip of paper in front of Mr. Monson, who read:

"Sell hundred shares Copiapo."

"That suggested something to me," Peters continued. "You will remember that one of the telegrams sent from Washington by Mrs. Winters was to a Philadelphia construction company?"

"Yes, the lady is going to build a sky-scraper in Hong Kong, or you eat with me."

"That 's just the point," said Peters, fairly dancing, "do you see, Hong Kong!"

"Humph! Does begin to look interesting, does n't it?"

"I 'm glad your mind is working."

"What does Hong Kong say?"

Peters placed another slip of paper before Mr. Monson, who glanced at it. It read:

> "Cable filed Prothero, British navy."

"Humph!"

"Prothero," said Peters, "is attached to the *Norwich,* Asiatic Station. I have notified the British branch as a precaution, but it is n't necessary."

"You don't think your case is hurt?"

"Of course not. Read this one."

Mr. Monson read:

> "Yes, on Winters."

"I cabled Hong Kong to learn if Mrs. Winters was there on the date this Valparaiso cable to White was sent. This is the answer. Prothero was the messenger boy. How these navy men do trail after a petticoat."

"How do you know that Prothero — "

"Why did God give me an imagination? Mrs. Winters is using an arbitrary code. 'Sell hundred shares' either identifies sender or refers to some person or thing. The last word conveys the information. Private affair, probably used by two people only, and for but one particular line of work, whatever that may be. Hardest kind of code to do anything with. So I am going to Namaschet."

"How does Mrs. Sabiston come in?"

"Hannibal White is her broker. She sends him orders nearly every day, and receives market reports."

"That is natural enough, he is a broker, is n't he?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"And Mrs. Winters —"

"Within a few hours after arriving from Hong Kong she is in touch with both White and Mrs. Sabiston. First she is going to visit the lady at Namaschet, and now somebody is going to visit her. Who that is I don't know. We 'll have to take a squint at her mail."

"I 'll attend to that," promised Mr. Monson.

"I asked Boston for a report on Mrs. Sabiston," Peters went on. "She is the widow of the President of the Sabiston Company, shoes, Brockton. You 've heard of Sabiston shoes?"

" I have on a pair," said Monson.

" A man would be lucky to be in Mr. Sabiston's shoes."

" Why so?"

" He left her about five millions. She lives on Commonwealth avenue, and has a summer home near Namaschet, a place called 'Rock Crest,' one of the finest estates on the South Shore, forty-five acres, and a house that cost a hundred thousand dollars. She is very good looking, under thirty — married Sabiston when he was sixty-three and she was twenty-two — and her maiden name was Margaretha Schoenleber."

" A German?"

" He met her at Wiesbaden and she landed him in two weeks."

" All right, go on to Namaschet, if you want to."

" Thanks. One thing more. Here 's a telegram I have just received from Boston: 'Sabiston advertising morning papers man to operate motorboat.' "

" Rather unusual season for motorboating for pleasure," observed Mr. Monson. " Maybe she is going to join the coast patrol, and apply for a commission as an Admiral."

" Fortunately," said Peters, " motorboating is my one folly."

" I should imagine she would n't have to advertise for a man," said Mr. Monson, after thinking for a moment.

"That occurred to me instantly."

"She should be able to pick one up anywhere on that coast."

"The answer is that she does n't want local talent. I shall apply for the job."

"All right, good luck."

"I 'm leaving this afternoon," said Peters. "I have some old togs that will just fit the picture, and I shall really enjoy it."

Peters had brought his bag to the office. He finished the work upon which he was engaged, and took an early train for New York, arriving in Boston a few minutes before nine o'clock the next morning.

It was his first visit to the complacent capital of New England, and the psychology of the vast throngs of people pouring slowly through the gates, on their leisurely way to work, amazed and confused him, for Peters was from the West, where folks show it when they hurry. Enormous as it was in its smoky hideousness, the South Station was congested with these somnambulant men and women, all hustling to work in the most dignified manner imaginable, showing the nervousness that was consuming them, and that came by living on a diet of sugar and time-tables, only in their eyes and complexions, but heroically keeping it out of their gait, and all of them so dingy and crumpled and sooty, and covered, as to shoes and trousers, and skirt-hems, with the same kind of fine, black mud, as to make it quite impossible to distinguish a bank president from his bookkeeper, or the mother of a prosperous family from her cook. Accustomed as he was to travelling, everywhere, and under all conditions, Peters was disturbed by this jam of self-satisfied humanity that long lines of reeking trains brought from their homes in the suburban towns and emptied into the depot in an endless stream, everybody with a little yellow bag in his hand, and nobody caring whether the clock was fast or slow.

A man who found pleasure in everything he did, Peters looked upon this scene with the keenest delight. Many of the faces were new types to him, and he studied them eagerly.

" They must be retired business men," he thought, " going in to their stores and offices from force of habit, and not because they have to."

The concrete platform upon which he was slowly crawling on his way to the gate being choked with people, and with trucks loaded with baggage and freight, and the opposite one nearly deserted, he crossed the intervening tracks, in order to make better time. A few people, outward bound, were taking a train then ready to pull out. The engineer was in his cab, the conductor at the last car had raised his hand. Peters saw two women sprinting through the gate.

"They must be strangers," thought Peters; "they don't care who knows they are in a hurry."

A porter, with a suitcase in his hand, and a big leather hat box under his arm, was struggling to keep up with them. The bell rang, the wheels slipped on the rails, the train straightened its vertebræ. The women ran like deer, their white spats twinkling, their skirts flying. Peters stopped to watch them, and as they raced abreast the train, now getting under way, he shouted to them: "You can make it — I 'll give you a hand."

He took the arm of the younger of the two, a tall, graceful girl, with an oval face and pale complexion, and a great mass of dark hair beneath her black spring straw. She grasped the brass rail, and swung aboard, giving Peters, by way of reward, a nod and a tantalizing glimpse of black silk hosiery. The gasping porter hurled the luggage upon the rear platform, and Peters, turning, saw that the other woman was not going. She waved her hand to the dark-eyed girl, and then turned, and walked back to the gate. The porter was slowly counting a dime that she had dropped into his eager palm.

" The more these Boston women has, the more they holds on to it," said the porter. " I like to broke my back, and look what I gets."

" She is n't a Boston woman," said Peters. " She has n't got the complexion, and her shoes are too clean."

" Yes she is, too," said the porter, " that 's Mrs. Sabiston."

" Sabiston ? " said Peters.

" You ain't from Boston yo'self, or you 'd have known her," commented the porter, in that tone of superiority that even the naturalized Bostonian eventually assumes.

" No," admitted Peters, " what Mrs. Sabiston ? "

" The Mrs. Sabiston, they ain't but one," sniffed the porter, who had not lost his corn-field English in the process of picking up a Back Bay accent. " Lives down at Namaschet, mostly. She travels through here considerable, but that don't put no fat on my han'."

" What train was that ? " asked Peters.

" The one that lady took ? That 's the New York express."

" Well, cheer up," laughed Peters, giving him a quarter, "you don't have to do much hurrying around this station. This place reminds me of Chicago — it's so different. Why, these people must have an engagement somewhere for next week."

"You ought to see 'em catching the 5:15 this evening, with them little yellow bags full of bottles, and in the summer time, man, it's positively hazardous around here afternoons, dodging goff sticks."

On his way out Peters stopped at the Western Union office, and wired a description of the dark-haired girl to New York. A fat man in a gray overcoat picked her out of the crowd in the Grand Central. He trailed her across town to the Pennsylvania Station and stood by examining a time-table when she stepped on board the train for Washington. Then he went to the telegraph office.

At the Union Station, in Washington, a man with a very blank face and a large black mustache, who looked like a policeman dressed up, watched her to her taxi, hired another when she had gone, and followed her out Massachusetts avenue, and into Seventeenth street. Half an hour later Mr. Monson filed away for future reference the fact that Mrs. Sabiston's friend, five feet seven, weight one hundred and thirty, hair dark, general appearance stylish, probably Italian, was visiting Mrs. Winters, at the Summit. Then he forgot all about it.

Peters, leaving the telegraph office, changed his clothes at a hotel across the street, under the Elevated, checked his suitcase at the baggage room in the depot, and in flannel shirt, corduroy trousers, and a heavy coat that had seen much service, took the train for Namaschet.

Two hours later he was employed by Mrs. Sabiston to run her motorboat, at thirty dollars a month, and board, and went to bed that night in an unheated loft over a small boathouse which stood in a clump of pines close to the water's edge. He had preferred it to a bed in the butler's room in the servants' quarters. He shivered as he pulled off his clothes.

"This must be Monson's east wind," he said, "I feel it in my bones."

CHAPTER XII

A VOICE IN THE DARK

Mrs. Sabiston's summer home was just across the street from Europe.

It stood on a rocky promontory facing the sea, which beat and thundered and roared at her door. She could step from her bed to her bath, in a little cove behind a line of ragged reefs, by going down a path through her flower garden, over the face of the cliff, where cement steps had been built into the solid granite when they could not be carved from the living stone.

Every morning in summer she took her dip at six o'clock in a one-piece silk bathing suit, for she enjoyed the privacy of Robinson Crusoe. No house was nearer than half a mile, and from no point on the shore in either direction could the cove at the foot of the stairway be seen.

The house had been built by her husband as a wedding gift, and the architect had admirably used, as the main building, the old house which had stood there since 1820. This was of solid construction.

The walls in some places were more than three feet thick. The timbers might have gone into a bridge. It was flanked on either side by an enormous brick chimney, on one of which was still attached the old-fashioned iron lightning rod that had been put up nearly a hundred years before. Around the old mansion the new house had been built. It would have been a "show place," but for the fact that on the land side it stood back so far from the main road, that ran south from the little town of Namaschet, that it could not be seen. A heavy growth of natural forest trees, some of them of such age that they might have been there when the Pilgrims landed, screened it from the view of passers-by. A private road, barred by an iron fence, led through the trees to the house. The garage, for twelve cars, was at the back, and below the level of the house; and the stables, which had long been closed, for Mrs. Sabiston kept no horses, were some distance away.

There was a garden at the right of the house, full of old-fashioned roses, the only flowers for which Mrs. Sabiston cared, and a large kitchen garden on the southern slope beyond the half-acre of rose bushes. The lawn immediately around the house, which extended in front to the edge of the cliff, was as finely kept as a putting green, but the rest of the estate was a primal wilderness. The trees had felt no pruning knife. The deadfalls were never taken up and burned.

Where the lawn ended the rocky walls of the cliff began. Huge masses of red stone, some of them larger than a house, seemed to have been thrown about by some convulsion of nature. The sea had been pounding upon them for ages, but though the grind of sand had been ceaseless the promontory remained unconquerable. At the foot of the cliff were other masses of the same red granite, some of it streaked strangely with broad stripes of bright yellow and black stone. Beyond them was a line of reefs, on which the waves pounded at high water, sending up huge and fantastic columns of white spray, and farther out, the open sea in all its thousand moods and shades.

In one place only the rocky barrier of the cliff was broken. Through this break the sea had found a way to make a small cove, sheltered on the outside by a long, low line of reefs, some of which showed their sharp heads a foot or two above water even on the highest tides. Here it had also made a bit of beach, with a bottom that was sometimes sand, sometimes small stones, rounded and polished by the waves. Here Mrs. Sabiston swam in summer, and here, the morning after his arrival, Peters found the motorboat of which he was to be the skipper.

As he looked out to sea across Massachusetts Bay, deep blue under a cloudless March sky, and whipped to foam where the reefs impeded the sweep of billow, he thanked his stars that he knew something about boats. He had never cruised in such waters as these, his excursions having been confined to the Lakes, when he had lived in the West, and to Chesapeake Bay, when he had removed to Washington.

He looked at the boat, fastened to a buoy, and did not think much of her. There was a small skiff hauled up at the head of the cove, and finding a pair of oars in the boathouse, he went out and looked her over. She was a thirty-foot, decked-over dory of about six feet beam, with a twelve horse-power, two-cylinder, two-cycle engine, forward and reverse clutch. She seemed to be about six years old. She was equipped with spray hood, cork cushions and oars. She improved upon inspection, and Peters imagined she would be very seaworthy. He went back, and found Mrs. Sabiston waiting for him on the beach.

She questioned him closely about his skill, and he saw that she knew as much about boats as he did himself. She was fond of the sport, and his duties would be to take her out whenever she desired to go. She had whims about such things, and he must be ready when she wanted him, as her fancies to go outside were sudden. For this reason he must remain within call at all times. She would insist upon this, and if he did not care to hold himself in readiness he might go, and she would engage another man, several having applied by mail. Peters said he would keep the job. He was interested in the wages.

"Very well," said Mrs. Sabiston, "you must become familiar with the boat. It is one that I bought second-hand and I want you to see what you can get out of her. It is useless to have a good boat here, as it is likely to be pounded to pieces any night in a storm. Therefore I shall expect you to take care that it is securely anchored and fastened to the buoy."

Peters was sure he would have no trouble. He had taken care of boats all his life.

"For the next day or two," continued Mrs. Sabiston, "you had better familiarize yourself with it. Take it outside and give it a trial. Watch the engine, and if there is anything wrong with it report to me and I will have a mechanic come down from Boston to repair it." She spoke with a slight German accent, so slight as to be almost unnoticeable.

She left him, with no further instructions, and Peters watched her as she climbed the stone stairs that wound up the face of the cliff, and thought that she was a very good-looking woman.

Margaretha no longer spent her life at the table. She had conquered her appetite, just in time to prevent it from conquering her, and eating, from being an art, had become a science. She had given up food entirely, and lived on vitamines and calories, and a famous dietitian, who had become interested in her, and shown her the way to health and beauty, prepared all her menus. She had a horror of the heavy stews and thick soups, the fried food and sweetmeats, of her childhood, and ate nothing but cereals, with butter and salt instead of sugar and cream, and vegetables. Broiled chicken and lobster were the only meats she tasted. She drank no coffee or tea, and although her cellar was stocked with wines, and her husband's favorite liquors, they were enjoyed only by her guests. At thirty she had the figure of a high-school girl and the complexion of a baby, a pink and white skin, as soft as velvet. Her corn-silk hair had ripened, and there was a tawny tinge in it, as though the sun had burned it.

She made such a pretty figure on the stairway, with the wind whipping her skirts about her neat ankles, that Peters lingered until she was gone. Then he ran to the boathouse, got his coat and an old sou'wester that he had seen there, rowed out to the motorboat, and tried the engine. It was in perfect condition. Feeling his way slowly, he made out the channel, and so got clear of the reefs. It was rough outside, and he was not quite sure of himself, at first, but confidence soon came to him, and after the first trial he enjoyed himself as though he were on a vacation. In a few days he had learned all about the dory, and he reported to Mrs. Sabiston that she seemed an admirable boat in every way, being tight and dry.

" I shall try her myself," said Margaretha.

" When do you wish to go out? "

" At once. Bring her in, and I will go aboard."

Peters brought the dory in, running her alongside an enormous flat rock, a natural wharf, where Mrs. Sabiston assured him there was plenty of water on all tides.

She stepped aboard, and took a seat in the stern, muffled to her pink ears in a big motor coat. There was not much wind, but the air had a sting in it to which Peters, fresh from the South, was not accustomed.

" Do you see that pinnacle of rock? " asked Margaretha, pointing.

"Yes, madam."

"Get your bearings by sighting the south chimney over that steeple. Have you got them? Then go straight out to sea five miles," she said. "That is your course."

Every day, for a week, after that, Peters took Mrs. Sabiston out, five miles, straight to sea, never more, never less, but five nautical miles, exactly. Attached to the bulkhead forward was a small "log" of brass and glass, that looked very much like an ordinary thermometer. Her eye on the indicator, Mrs. Sabiston noted the speed, and from this calculated the distance covered from the big reef that lay directly beneath the Colonial portico of the house on the cliff. Having gone five miles Peters would be ordered to stop the engine and they would drift until the order was given to return; and always, as they started back, the huge chimney over the pinnacle of red granite would be dead ahead. A pair of binoculars lay at hand in the stern-sheets, but on clear days they were not needed.

"You are learning very well," said Mrs. Sabiston, evidently much pleased, as she started up the stairs one day after returning from one of these excursions.

"So," thought Peters, "I 'm learning something. I wonder what the deuce it is?"

He had been confined so closely to the boat since his arrival that he had learned very little about the house or its occupants. That Mrs. Sabiston was not alone was evident. At night he saw reflections against the window shades, but whoever the guests were they did not show themselves in the day; and being employed wholly in connection with the motorboat, and living as he did at the boathouse, Peters found no opportunity to enter the house. His meals were served to him at the boathouse, where after the first day a fire was made for him in a rusty old stove that apparently had not been used for years. His bedroom in the loft above remained unheated, but Mrs. Sabiston sent down to him a supply of thick blankets, and he managed to be comfortable at night.

The servants who brought his meals to him were German, and he soon came to understand that none but Germans were employed. Thinking it wise to conceal the fact that he spoke that language, he asked no questions. He hoped that some day Mrs. Sabiston, unsuspecting his acquaintance with her mother tongue, might say something in his presence that would give him a lead, but on the trips with him she invariably went alone.

Mrs. Sabiston did not care for horses, and had sold the stable that her husband had owned at his death. But she was inordinately fond of dogs, and had four, which Peters thought were the handsomest he had ever seen.

Her favorite was an English pointer, a thoroughbred, groomed like a woman, slender of build, delicate, and as high-strung as a racehorse. His name was Bruno, and he accompanied Mrs. Sabiston everywhere. Around his neck he wore for a collar a heavy gold-linked band, like a woman's bracelet. In the gold lock which fastened it was set a diamond. The other dogs were Danes, heavy, ferocious-looking beasts with tawny hides and mouths like steel traps. These stayed in the stable all day, and were turned into the grounds at night; and Peters could hear them, when he had gone to bed, sniffing at the door of the boathouse.

Peters was fond of dogs, and owned a setter that accompanied him on all his motorboat trips down the Potomac, when he would get a bit of vacation and go away for a few days. Whether because his clothes bore the canine odor of his four-footed companion, or because he sensed in him a man who knew and understood dogs, Bruno quickly took a fancy to him. The pointer slept in the house at night, but always looked Peters up the first thing in the morning, and went with him in the motorboat, even when he sailed out alone, as Mrs. Sabiston made him do, every day, to cover the course she had laid down for him. The dog was an affectionate animal and seemed unhappy when he could not have his head in some human being's lap. He would lie at Peters' feet, asleep, on his coat, for the weather had suddenly become much milder, and the sou'wester was no longer needed as extra covering.

One day, when Mrs. Sabiston informed him that she would not desire to go out with him, Peters tuned the engine up, and tried it out for speed. He ran down the coast, keeping a mile or two off shore, and finding a little harbor unexpectedly breaking through the sand dunes, made a landing at Scituate, where he laid in a supply of tobacco. He spent half an hour in the sleepy little town, and before he left, happening to think of Monson, wrote him a note, in which he recounted briefly the uneventful experiences of his new employment. Then he chugged back, found his bearings, and navigated the reefs by twilight, which made him quite proud of himself, for it was the most treacherous looking water he had ever sailed in.

Bruno had been turned out on the lawn, for his evening's exercise, and Peters could hear him barking at the top of the cliff. He went into the boathouse, started the fire, and sat down to his supper, which had been left for him, when he heard the grunts of a heavy-breathing animal at the door, and the pawing of sharp claws. He tip-toed across the room, and looking through the window, saw two of the Danes rolling and tumbling about in the sand, at play. The third was evidently smelling at his door. As he looked Bruno bounded into view, and the dog at the door went over and wished him good evening, dog style. Peters whistled, and Bruno pricked up his ears. He opened the door a crack, and Bruno came jumping joyously toward him. The Dane looked, and his ears went back. Then he began walking slowly toward him. Peters had on the old sou'-wester which was Bruno's favorite bed when they went out to sea together, and to this fact he probably owed his life, for coming to a desperate resolve very suddenly, although not in the least underestimating the ferocity or fidelity of the Dane dogs, Peters opened the door of the boat-house, sat down upon the sill, and pulled Bruno into his lap. The Dane watched him, uttering not a sound. The other two were busy with their sport.

Peters pulled Bruno's ears, and scratched his head, but he kept his eye on the Dane, who came toward him suspiciously, his tail stiff. He was wise enough to make no move, to speak no word. He understood dogs, and he knew what this one could do to him. The Dane came on, and neither barked nor growled, and Peters could smell its fetid breath, hot, reeking of raw meat. He did not move, and the Dane stopped, and sniffed at the old sou'wester that he wore. He sniffed at Peters' hand, that had been caressing Bruno's glossy skin. He smelled Peters' trousers, where the setter had rubbed himself a hundred times. Peters put out his hand boldly, unhesitatingly, as a man does who knows that between him and dogs there is a bond of sympathy and understanding. He scratched the great Dane's ears, and massaged the folds of skin at the base of the skull. The huge beast rolled over, and Peters ran his hand across the powerful muscles of his breast, and dug his fingers into his ribs. The other two Danes came up, and seeing that everything was quite all right, laid down a little distance away. Peters spoke to them the language he had learned from dogs.

Presently there came a whistle from the house, and Bruno sprang to his feet, and stood listening. There came another whistle, and he stretched himself. The whistle was repeated, long and clear, and Bruno bounded away. The Danes looked at him, blinking, but did not follow, and Peters, stretching forth his hand in the darkness, pulled the monster nearest him by the ears, and rubbed its backbone with his knuckles. He stood up, and the dog rose lazily to his feet. He spoke, and walked down the beach toward the stairs that led up the side of the cliff. The Dane looked at him, then joined him, marching by his side, and Peters gave a great sigh of contentment.

Every night, after that, the dogs came to him, and he made friends with them, and fed them. Every night he walked with them to the foot of the stone stairway, and each night he went up that stairway a little farther, a step or two at a time. Finally the night came, when he stepped out upon the soft lawn at the summit of the cliff, already soggy and yielding to the feet, for the frost was going out of the ground. The dogs were with him. He walked up and down by the rose garden, keeping out of sight of the house, although the night was dark, for the moon was in its infancy.

Thereafter at night he walked more boldly about the grounds, always accompanied by the dogs, and wearing an old pair of tennis shoes that he had found in the boathouse. At last the night came when he dared approach the house. He walked softly upon the wide veranda, and peered through the window. On the hearth the embers of a dying fire were glowing. They made a soft, shadowy light, by which he made out that the room was either a library or a living room. There was a deep divan by the fireplace, and a table, with a lamp and books upon it, at its back. The rest of the room was shrouded in impenetrable gloom. On the other side of the piazza the shutters were closed, and he could see nothing. He walked around the house, the dogs at his heels, and then, it being after one o'clock in the morning, he turned in, the dogs accompanying him to the door of the boathouse.

Mrs. Sabiston had planned to go out with him at ten o'clock the following morning, and he was ready at the hour, but she did not come. He waited, the boat in readiness, but noon came, and she had not arrived. Mindful of his instructions, he waited on the beach, walking up and down from the boathouse to the stairway, to keep himself warm. At one o'clock she appeared. He brought the dory in, and helped her aboard. As he was pushing off he saw a maid, in black dress and white cap, running down the stairway. She was calling, but her voice was lost in the pounding of the surf against the rocks, for the tide was high. He told Mrs. Sabiston, and they waited. The girl came up breathlessly, and Mrs. Sabiston leaned over the rail and took the telegram the servant handed to her. She read it, and said in German: " I shall be back in time," and then gave Peters the order to shove off.

They shipped a little water passing the reefs, and there was nothing to bail it out with. She called him to account for this, and he promised to see that it would not happen again. She went forward to the " log," the wind tearing at her coat, and while steadying herself as she tried to fasten it more closely the telegram, which she still held in her hand, blew away. Peters watched it, his heart in his mouth. He stifled an exultant shout when it fluttered down almost at his feet. His anxious eye upon it, he saw it rest lightly upon the water in the bottom of the boat. Gradually it became soaked and soggy. Mrs. Sabiston made no search for it, and Peters saw with satisfaction that it was now too wet and heavy to blow away.

They covered the five-mile course, drifted about ten minutes or so, got their bearings by the chimney over the granite steeple, and started back, Mrs. Sabiston smiling to herself all the way.

Peters busied himself about the boat, and when she had disappeared over the top of the cliff, his hand closed over the telegram, and he rolled it into a ball in his palm, and took it to the boathouse. There, by the fire, he dried it, smoothed it out, and examined it anxiously. The ink was blurred, but the message could be made out. He read it softly to himself:

> Missed connection New York, arrive Namaschet 5:10.
>
> CORRIE HARDING WINTERS.

Peters chuckled. He very much desired to see the lady who had been in Hong Kong when one Prothero, of the British navy, had sent a cablegram to Mr. Hannibal G. White, in Valparaiso, and who had herself sent telegrams to the same Mr. White in New York. How to manage it was another question. He doubted very much whether Mrs. Sabiston would take her out with them in the motorboat, for there were evidently other guests in the house, who had not accompanied their hostess, on any of her trips to sea.

"I shall have to get into the house," said Peters to himself, "and I may as well try it tonight."

He ran up to his loft, and felt under the mattress to make sure that his automatic was where he had put it, and after idling away the early part of the evening, huddled over his stove, he slipped the gun into his pocket at midnight, and a few minutes later climbed the stairway, and came out upon Mrs. Sabiston's lawn.

Great was his astonishment to find the house, that had always been dark at this hour, showing a brilliant light in a window on the top floor immediately above the south end of the piazza, the last window, toward the south, of the main house.

"That," said Peters, to himself, stroking the ears of one of the Danes that had come out to meet him, "is about the most brilliant thing in the way of a light that I have ever seen."

He kept in the shadows of a clump of cedars. As he looked the light suddenly went out, and he was about to move forward, when it flashed forth again. He shrank back into the trees, and waited. The light disappeared, and was not turned on again. He stood there, straining his eyes at the window, and the night seemed a deeper black than it had been before. As he watched he saw a spark play up and down the lightning rod that surmounted the north chimney. It fascinated him.

Keeping in the shadows of the trees and shrubbery of the rose garden, he worked his way to the rear of the house.

From where he had stood before the sky-line was obscured by the dense woods.

Now he could see, between the two chimneys, over the house top, a bright expanse of clear, open sky. Against this background the web of a wireless stood out faintly, the wires strung between the chimneys. As he assured himself of this the spark appeared again, a tongue of bluish flame, playing up and down along the lightning rod.

" They forgot about the induction from that lightning rod," said Peters, chuckling softly. " Portable radio, put up at night and taken down before dawn. Very clever, if they had n't forgotten about that lightning rod. Bad insulation, and I saw the spark. The smartest of them slip up sometime."

He became aware now that, whereas the rest of the house was in darkness, the middle room on the second story of the old building was lighted, as was one back room in the north wing.

" In one or the other of those rooms," whispered Peters to himself, " somebody is sending a radiogram, and somehow or other I must take a good look at him."

He cursed the stupidity which had led him, because of his aversion to sleeping in the room with another person, to choose a bedroom in the boathouse loft. But for that, he reflected, he would be in the servants' quarters, from which he might make his way into other parts of the house, upstairs.

" And on the other hand," he added, " if I had been indoors tonight that spark would have sputtered without my having seen it."

This thought made him feel a little better. The lighted room in the old building was directly above the back portico. A rose trellis at one side of this gave him an idea. He tried it, and found it of heavy wire. It was attached at the top to the cornice of the portico. Peters put his weight on it, it held him, and he began to climb. He reached the roof, pulled himself over the edge, and on his belly wriggled toward the window. The shade was pulled down to within an inch of the bottom window frame, and putting his eye at this narrow crack of light, he looked into the room.

At a table in the middle of the floor sat a heavy-featured German, with a brown mustache. Over his head was a metallic harness, and his ears were covered with two hard, round black rubber disks.

" Receiving," said Peters to himself, impressing the man's picture upon his memory. As he looked the man reached forward, and while Peters could not see the instruments he knew were there, the unmistakable " wh-r-r-r-r! wh-r-r-r-r! " of the wireless came to his straining ears.

" Sending," commented Peters, and slid softly to the edge of the portico roof. He lowered himself to the ground. Followed by the dogs, he crept back until he was in the shadow of the trees, and then worked his way around through the rose garden, until he was at the head of the stairs. He wanted to go back to the boathouse, and think. As he started down the steps one of the dogs raised its head, and drew its lips over its fangs.

"They 're on the job," thought Peters, "but they don't advertise it." Creeping back he peered across the lawn, and in the dim light of the stars he saw the figure of a woman, coming toward him from the house.

Reckless then in his haste he threw himself down the stairway, for the slim, alert figure was that of Mrs. Sabiston. He reached the bottom bruised and sore, ran to the boathouse, keeping as far under the cliff as he could, and was on his bed, in the loft, when he heard her calling to him, and throwing rocks at the door. Presently he arose, stamped down the steps, and unfastened the door, and stood there looking at her in bewilderment, rubbing his eyes.

"What is it, madam?" he asked.

"I am nervous tonight, and can't sleep," replied Mrs. Sabiston. "I should like to go out in the motorboat."

"When, madam?"

"At once."

"Yes, madam."

"Come, then. You have your overcoat on," she added suspiciously.

" I have been sleeping in my clothes," said Peters. " It is very cold."

Mrs. Sabiston shuddered at the thought of sleeping in one's clothes.

" She is excited," thought Peters. " I wonder what 's up? "

" Please be quick," said Mrs. Sabiston.

He followed her to the flat rock, and she lighted his way with an electric flash of strong power that she took from the pocket of her coat, while he found the skiff, rowed out to the dory, and brought it in. As soon as its gunwale scraped against the stone she stepped aboard.

He looked at her inquiringly.

" Five miles, straight out to sea," she said.

" Yes, madam."

" The same course."

" I understand, madam."

" You take the wheel."

Peters started the engine, and went aft, and Mrs. Sabiston stood in the bow and turned her pocket searchlight on the reefs ahead. It was low water, and they showed plainly.

" You will take your bearings by the south chimney and the pinnacle rock," she said.

" In the *dark?* "

" Certainly."

Peters turned, and as he looked back over his wake, there suddenly shone out in the south window the brilliant white light he had seen there an hour before. Looking full into it now he judged that it was a calcium, with a powerful reflector. It flooded the red granite steeple in a radiant bath that made it stand out like a sentinel against the night.

" The light," said Mrs. Sabiston, " is almost directly beneath the chimney. Hold her dead ahead, about ten miles an hour."

" Aye, aye, madam."

Mrs. Sabiston turned her pocket flashlight on the " log," and studied the indicator. It was a dark, heavy night. The wind was light, and getting into the east. The sea was calm. Peters kept his eyes on his bearings and was beginning to think that they had covered the course, when Mrs. Sabiston, looking up quickly from the indicator of the " log," called to him sharply, " Way enough! ", and swept the water around them with her light.

Peters stopped the engine, and got upon his feet, and then, for the first time, saw lying dead over the bow a low, black hulk, shadowy and indistinct. Mrs. Sabiston's light found it, and then she snapped it off. A man's voice hailed cheerily in German:

" *Wie geht 's!* "

"How do you do," answered Mrs. Sabiston, in English.

The dory, drifting slowly under her headway, now grated upon the black hulk, which Peters made out to be a submarine.

Her stern swung around, and the two boats were sucked together by the tide and lay quietly length to length.

On the U-boat's deck stood a little group of men. Two of them came to the side, and grasped the dory with boathooks. A third shook hands in the darkness with somebody at his back, and then stepped into the motorboat.

He greeted Mrs. Sabiston warmly and they whispered a few words together.

As the man came aboard the bow of the dory swung off, and as the stern now came around, Peters was suddenly seized under the arms, and hauled up the sloping deck of the submarine.

He struggled to free himself, to get at his gun, but two other men grasped him by the knees, tripping him up, and he felt himself being lowered down a companion-way.

He heard a man outside say in English, "Let me take the helm, Mrs. Sabiston," and her fresh, silvery voice calling from the darkness,

"Gott befohlen! Auf Wiedersehen!"

There was the purr of a motor, the undersea boat began submerging, and turned its nose toward the German submarine base at Caribou Island, on the Maine coast.

" The smartest of them," said Mr. Peters to himself reminiscently, " slip up sometime."

CHAPTER XIII

CORRIE GIVES A PARTY

Corrie Winters was a bird of passage, but when she did light she insisted upon having an attractive nest. Where she abided permanently, and two months in any town made her regard herself as one of the oldest inhabitants, she built a bower.

She owned little furniture, preferring to sell such things when she was through with them, with a view to buying new ones when she should require them again. She could fly into a strange city, anywhere in the world, in the morning, purchase some wicker tables and chairs, a big, deep divan, to fit her velvet cushions, and a small brass bed, and by evening transform a bare apartment into a charming retreat. The possessions upon which she prided herself, and which she had been accumulating all over the earth for years, consisted almost wholly of rugs, draperies, and silverware.

When she became finally settled her walls would be hung with rare Chinese embroideries and Japanese and Indian silks, picked up with discriminating taste in the Orient, her floors would be covered with the richest treasures of Turkey and Persia. Her lamp shades were invariably selected with careful regard for their effect upon her complexion, and she always wore gowns, of her own designing, that harmonized with her surroundings.

Innumerable photographs, in gold and silver frames, stood about in her rooms, most of them of men. The same instinct prompted their display as leads a sportsman to hang above his fireplace the head of a moose. They were her trophies of the chase.

To spend an evening with Mrs. Winters was a privilege. Her cigarettes were made to her order in Cairo or Constantinople, and although they bore her monogram in silver, they were neither gold-tipped nor scented, for Mrs. Winters enjoyed tobacco for its own sake. She had lived in the wine districts of France and Italy so long, when her husband had been in the consular service, that she knew almost as much about vintages as most people pretend to know. Her cocktails were famous.

Billy thought of the cocktail before he remembered that he had promised to go to Mrs. Winters' that evening. He had been reading "The Song of Songs," and preferred Sudermann to other company, but finally he tore himself away from the book and dressed, taking so much time at his bath that it was nearly nine o'clock when he closed the door of Lawson's apartment behind him, and walked up the stairs to the next floor above, where Mrs. Winters lived.

Her rooms were crowded when he entered. There was a poker game at a table in the reception hall, and in the drawing room beyond were two tables of bridge.

Senator Marshfield, who had just won a large pot on a small pair, hailed him with a shout of delight.

Mrs. Winters came forward smilingly, in a simple little white gown, with milky-white beads clinging to arms, waist, and hips. It was exquisite, and might have been worn by a grammar-school miss. Her hair was banded close across the forehead, and tucked up at the nape of the neck, like the coiffure of a nun. A pair of barbaric jewelled earrings belied the grammar school and the nunnery.

She introduced him to the few he did not know. Little Wallis was there, full of unuttered thoughts, and Gaines, of the *Porpoise,* with whom he had served in the Caribbean. There was an attaché of the Italian Embassy, a vapid-looking man with a sensual eye and a small waxed mustache which he everlastingly twirled, two young officers of the army, and a famous specialist, whose two passions in life were frontal sinuses and no-trump bids. The women were young girls, just learning to drink cocktails and smoke, and making the usual rapid progress of beginners.

Billy said he would be delighted to fill in at the poker table, but Mrs. Winters slipped her arm through his, and led him into the bow-window of the drawing room, where a slender girl, with deep, dark violet eyes, and a mass of hair so brown in shade that it was almost black framing a face of the Italian type, arose to greet them, the men about her falling away on either side as she stood up.

" I want you to meet Miss Fralli, Billy," said Corrie.

" Miss Fralli," he murmured, the room suddenly spinning about him like a top. He took the small, delicate hand she held out to him. It was Elfrieda.

He looked at her without daring to speak, his brain in a turmoil. He could only stand and look, just look at her, tongue-tied, stammering, inarticulate. The blood rushed to his face, and then receded, leaving him white under his sea-tan. He was hot all over, and then suddenly numb to his feet. He became aware that everyone was looking at him curiously, that the laughter and chatter had ceased.

He shook hands with her again, mechanically, and went back to the poker table, and Corrie saw that he was trembling.

"What 's the matter, Billy?" she whispered. "I thought you could face a good-looking girl without quaking. I shall have to put a pair of blinders on you."

There was more composure in her voice than in her soul, and she thought to herself, as she sat down and took up her cards, that she would give all she had if she could see in Billy Hartmann's eyes the look Miss Fralli must have seen in them.

Billy was still in a daze when supper was served. He drank a cocktail, tasted the oysters, choked on a single cracker.

Elfrieda eluded him, keeping the distance of the room between them. Always there was an eager guard around her. She smiled, and laughed, and showed her little white teeth, and there was a touch of color in her clear, creamy skin. She dominated the whole room, not by her beauty, not by her clothes, but by her personality. The very air around her was charged with it, as if her body were a dynamo sending out currents of some strange and subtle force.

Billy tried to eat, to be agreeable, to talk. The conversation was about the war. Everybody was cynical and apathetic, except the army and navy officers, who said little, but listened intently whenever anyone spoke.

There was some indignation at the transfer of General Birch, which had just been announced. It had been expected that he would command the army, and his removal to an obscure and minor post on the eve of hostilities had proved a mild sensation. One of the young girls thought it served him right. He had been entirely too critical and naturally he had made enemies. She supposed there were others.

" They will send for Birch yet," said little Wallis, who was having his palm read by a débutante with a face like an angel and a gown like a chorus girl's.

" Why will they send for him? " demanded Senator Marshfield, snorting.

" They will find that they can't get along without him," replied Wallis, blushing at his loquacity.

One of the army men looked as though he would like to say something, but after opening his mouth he shrugged his shoulders and helped himself to a highball.

Elfrieda was talking to the Italian about Milan, and he was looking at her in a way that made Billy grind his teeth. He replied to the chatter of the girl on the divan beside him in monosyllables, his forehead in a frown. He signalled Elfrieda with his eyes that he wanted to speak to her, but she pretended not to catch his meaning. He felt that he must see her, must speak with her alone. He waited desperately for the party to break up, but it was after two o'clock when the guests began to look for their hats and coats.

He lingered on, among the last. Finally all went away, except Senator Marshfield, who was voluble. He expected a declaration of war, although he was opposed to it himself. If Americans had n't persisted in going abroad the country would n't have been in this trouble. They should have stayed at home, and minded their own business.

"Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Winters?" he asked.

"Of course I don't," said Corrie emphatically. "People have a right to travel."

Senator Marshfield had touched on something in which she was very much interested. He changed the subject and the conversation dragged. Even Mrs. Winters, who would have been classified ornithologically as an owl, yawned. Billy managed to get Elfrieda by the window.

"I must see you tonight," he said.

"Not tonight, Billy, it 's quite impossible," she whispered.

"But I must. I tell you I must. I feel as though my head would burst. What are you doing here, under an assumed name?"

"It 's my stage name, but you must n't give me away. I have a good reason for being here. We will talk it over tomorrow. It is good to see you, Billy."

"It is more than good to see you again. I 've longed so for the sight of you, and here you stand. It 's like having Heaven suddenly open before me."

"You are nervous."

"I am always like this when I am with you. Don't you remember, the last time, in the *Tiergarten*, how I shook when I said good bye to you? I am like that, sometimes, merely from thinking of you."

"Stop, Billy," she said quickly. "Come to see me in the morning."

"You are visiting Mrs. Winters?"

She nodded that she was.

"How long shall you be here?"

"I do not know."

"Can't you tell me why you are here? How did you come, at such a time as this, when travel from the other side is so hazardous?"

"Through Italy," she answered. "There was no trouble, no danger, I have Italian passports."

"Have you just arrived?"

"In Washington, yes. I have been visiting an old friend, Mrs. Sabiston, at her home near Boston, for a week."

Senator Marshfield was at the door. "Come along, Billy," he called, "it is getting late."

Billy shook hands with Mrs. Winters, and went away without another word with Elfrieda, merely smiling his good bye. He felt stifled and ill at ease.

At the elevator he said good night to Senator Marshfield. "I think I 'll go to my rooms for my coat, and take a walk," he said.

"Do you live here?"

"I am occupying the apartment of a friend."

"Well, get your coat, and I 'll wait for you downstairs, and go as far as the hotel with you," said the Senator.

Billy rejoined him at the entrance, and they walked down the street together.

"Smart woman," said Senator Marshfield. "Did you observe how she headed off that conversation about General Birch? There was a squall brewing, but she stepped in, and presently we were all talking about something else. I noticed it."

"She is very clever," Billy agreed.

" They certainly did throw it into Birch," observed the Senator, helping himself to a cigar from his case. " That little Miss What 's-her-name hit it off exactly; it serves him right."

" Everybody says his removal was political," said Billy.

" Political," snorted Senator Marshfield, " well, was n't his appointment in the first place political ? "

" He is a natural-born soldier," insisted Billy, warmly.

" Natural-born politician," grunted Senator Marshfield. " He came from my old Congressional district. If he had n't gone into the army I would still be practising law in a one-horse town. We can't afford to let a man like that get any glory out of this war — he 's too good a vote-getter."

Billy stopped, and regarded Senator Marshfield with a look of amazement on his face.

" Too good a vote-getter ? " he repeated, as if he had not heard correctly.

" Ab — solutely ! "

" What 's that got to do with it, if he is an efficient soldier, and the government needs him ? The War Department knows that he is a great soldier, everybody knows it. It is one of those things there can be no mistake about. It is in his record, and you can see it in his face. You know it, and the whole country knows it."

"That 's just the point," laughed Senator Marshfield. "Of course he 's a pretty good soldier. All you army and navy people say so, and you ought to know if anybody does. But he 's too popular. We 'll be electing a President again before you realize it, son."

"Four years before we have a new President," reminded Billy.

"Who said anything about a new one?" demanded Senator Marshfield. "That 's just the point. Well, an ambitious man might find it easy to make in this kind of a war the sort of military reputation that leads to the White House. After the first blood has been spilled the American people will be clamoring for a hero. I know 'em — they are never happy without a hero."

"Birch is a soldier," said Billy. "He has been trying for years, long before this war was dreamed of, to do for the United States what Roberts tried to do for England. He is n't thinking about the White House."

"But some of the long-headed politicians are. We 've got to be careful, son, mighty careful," and Senator Marshfield chuckled.

"He should not be put aside at a time like this for political reasons," said Billy, vigorously.

"Is n't he being put forward for political reasons?" demanded the Senator. "Of course he is — that 's the game. I was n't born yesterday. General Birch is being groomed for the Presidency by a crowd that wanted to put him over last time, and could n't. We propose to head them off."

"There should n't be any politics now," Billy said.

"Son," replied Senator Marshfield, "in this country everything is politics."

"You gave out a statement at the White House this morning that the watchword now was 'Patriotism first,'" said Billy. "I read it in the newspapers. It was splendid."

"I got some good headlines, did n't I?" he chuckled. "Sure, patriotism first. By the way, Billy, they 're going to put one of the big mobilization camps in our State, I 've just fixed it."

"It 's a rotten selection," said Billy. "We have n't adequate transportation facilities out there."

"Transportation?" demanded Senator Marshfield, looking at him pityingly. "Man, it 's a doubtful State!"

"You speak as if politics was the supreme consideration."

"It is, nearly, and don't forget, son, that we always have made our Presidents on the battlefield. And we 'll be doing it again, if we are n't careful. We got a crop of them from the Revolution, there was Andy Jackson, the Mexican war furnished its quota, and the Civil war produced a whole raft of them, clear down to McKinley. We had a scrap with Spain, and even that gave us one."

"Yes, by God," said Billy, "and he was a whale."

"That 's what the people used to think, once."

"And they will think it again."

"Not if we see him first, they won't," said Senator Marshfield, grimly. "We shall refuse to make any political generals — if we can get away with it," and he chuckled as he chewed the end of his cigar.

"Political!" said Billy. "Why, the man 's a natural leader. He could raise an army while anybody else was recruiting a platoon."

"Yes, and it would be his army, and if he ever got on the battle line it would be his own private war. He 'd even make France forget who Joffre was."

"To see him leading an American army to Europe would be an inspiring sight," insisted Billy.

"That 's not the point," interrupted the Senator, "what we are thinking about is how he would look coming back."

"If he is to be kept out because of politics," said Billy, "it 's a pity the Constitution was n't amended to make him ineligible for a third term."

"We could n't do it," said Senator Marshfield, regretfully.

"You had the votes at one time."

"We could have limited him to two terms more, but we could n't have prevented him from going back. There 's an ex post facto clause in the Constitution, son. Did you ever think of that?"

"So you 're going to keep him —"

"Out of the spotlight," nodded Senator Marshfield. "That is," he added doubtfully, "if we can. It may be impossible to do it. He 'll go tearing around telling everybody what a great general he is, and thousands of the feeble-minded of the genus Ovis will fall for it. They already think that San Juan was one of the fifteen decisive battles of the world. If I had my way about it I 'd make him a Major General and Custodian-in-Chief of the ink bottle, and let him write all the round robins. I don't see why he does n't apply for a commission as Admiral of the Navy, he 's spent a month aboard ship for every day he ever spent in the camp or on the battle-field. I don't believe in sending twenty thousand hot-headed, untrained Americans to France to be slaughtered to make a headline holiday. Still, we may have to let him go. If we don't he 'll probably organize a third-party movement and break up the darned war. On the other hand, it may prove advisable to have a third-termer for the other candidate, hey? You can't tell. Lots of things enter into this question."

"You 'll have to send somebody to France, that 's certain," said Billy, "the inevitable logic of the situation will require it."

"The obvious thing," agreed Senator Marshfield, "is to pick somebody for the calcium like yourself."

"Like me?" said Billy, wonderingly.

"A naturalized American. Suppose we had some general who was born in Canada, for instance, and put him right out in the full glare of publicity, would n't that be a corking idea?"

"If he was a good soldier, yes."

"Hang it, if there 's a point anywhere you miss it," said Senator Marshfield, in the pitying tone of a professor addressing an infant class. "I mean from the political point of view. He could n't be President, and he could go after all the glory he wanted."

"Oh, I see."

"Sure. We 've got to find a man like that, or else some cracking good soldier who has something in his private record, something not generally known, that would overwhelm him in a political campaign, and that he would know would overwhelm him."

"A man like that would n't be in the army," said Billy.

"Maybe not, and maybe yes," replied Senator Marshfield, drawing his left eye into a laborious wink. "Maybe yes. We don't propose to turn this country over to the military, son, but if we find that we shall have to, he 'll be our kind of a military man. Here 's my hotel, so good night."

Billy walked back to his apartment and passed a restless night. The atmosphere of Washington was beginning to nauseate him. He thought of Elfrieda, of the false colors under which she was passing, and did not close his eyes until daylight.

CHAPTER XIV

IN SPITE OF ALL YOUR HEART

Billy wasted almost the entire day at the Navy Department, and it was late in the afternoon when Elfrieda, who had been watching the clock since breakfast, heard his knock at the door and went to let him in.

He shook hands with her gravely, and thought, as they went into the drawing room, " she is more beautiful than ever." He found it hard to realize that years had passed since he had seen her before, years that had changed him from a boy to a man, and had left her a girl, with the same flawless skin, the same soft hair, the same deep eyes that made him tremble when he looked into them. Her body was fuller and rounder, but she had lost none of the supple gracefulness of her young girlhood. " She has not felt the years as I have," he thought, as he stood on the rug by the window regarding her, with such a look in his eyes that she turned her head away, not daring to return his glance.

Mrs. Winters was at her dentist's. They had the drawing room to themselves. He could scarcely speak, could only look at her, with hungry longing. He asked after the family in Berlin.

The war had fallen heavily upon the Sigberts, all of them. Charlotte's business, built up after years of teaching, had been ruined. Nobody was taking music lessons in Berlin now. Their income had been much reduced, and only the money from the property in America sustained them. Now there was a possibility that that would be cut off. She did not know what they would do. Food was very scarce, and they had all suffered except herself, who had learned long ago from Ruhlmann how to live on simple fare. Helena had married, a young man of good family, an officer in a Bavarian regiment. He had been killed at Verdun two months later, and Helena had a baby, born after his father's death. Greta had been in a hospital at Posen since the beginning of the war. She now had an important post.

Billy stared out of window, a mist before his eyes. Finally he asked:

"And you?"

"I have been serving the government," she replied, hesitatingly.

"And your music?"

"I have given up everything. When the war is over I shall keep on. I shall reach my goal, some day."

"You have not yet — "

"I have not found success. I have been within reach of it, I have had it within my grasp, only to see it slip away, but I shall try again. I must sing, I must sing, Billy, it would kill my mother if I failed, and the same old demon within me is whipping me on."

"I understand, dear," he said. "I promised you, the day I saw you last in the *Tiergarten,* that I would not speak to you again of myself until — until you had achieved your ambition. Surely you will not hold me to that now. I love you, Frieda, I have loved you every day of my life from the day I saw you first, from the day I kissed you in the old grape arbor there at home, from the day I said good bye to you when you went back to Germany, from the day I left you in Berlin to go my way alone. The best of life is still before us, Frieda. Come to me now."

"I must keep on to the end," she answered. "All look to me to do this thing, and more than ever now their hopes for the future are bound up in my success. I cannot fail them, so I must go on, and all the work must be repeated when the fighting ends, and all the steps that I have climbed up in the past I must mount slowly, one by one, again, I must continue till I win or die."

"You will succeed, I know, dear heart, the spark that burns in your immortal soul will never flicker out. That 's why I love you so, and shall go on to love you to the end."

He stood up quickly, and walked to where she sat. "And now," he said, a new note in his voice that grew into a whisper as he spoke, "you know what next to you lies closest to my heart. . . . Tell me about Karl."

She would not look at him as she replied, "There is not much to tell you, Billy." She tried to speak again, but could not go on, and clasped and unclasped her hands nervously.

"Elsa cabled me at Manila, that he was dead, and that is all I have ever known, except for what I saw in a brief line in one of the papers. How did Elsa know?"

"I sent her word."

"You thought of me? I shall never forget that, Elfrieda."

"Don't, Billy, I cannot bear to have you speak like that — don't thank me, I cannot stand it. When — when it happened, I thought at once of Elsa. Although she remained behind when we went back to Germany, we had always kept in touch with her. She is a faithful friend, more than a servant. Mother mourns for her even now."

"Aunt Lottie misses the good things she used to cook," smiled Billy sadly, thinking of his boyhood. "I can see her now in the old kitchen at home, making the icing for the cake. She always gave the spoon to Karl." He stopped, and then went on: "Tell me everything, Elfrieda, I can stand it now, tell me how he died — my brother. Thank God, it was in battle."

Elfrieda looked up at him, her face ashen, every vestige of color gone from skin and eyes. She was silent.

"Is there nothing more you can tell me?"

"Nothing."

"Where is he buried?"

"His — his — his body was not recovered. It was — simply reported to us that he was dead, that he had gone down with his ship."

Billy felt for a chair. After a while he said:

"Elfrieda, why are you in the United States under a name that is not your own?"

"I cannot tell you. All I can say is that you must not betray me."

"But some one may recognize you."

"It is not likely. I have been away for many years. I thought I should faint last night when

Senator Marshfield came into the room. He used to live in our town, but I was a little girl then, and he did not know me. I know nobody in Washington."

"Still, somebody may see you. Neil Lawson, for instance. He would remember you."

"Where is he?"

"In Florida, now, but he may return. I am occupying his apartment on the floor below."

"I shall have to guard against that. You will not tell?"

"Of course not."

"Do you promise?" She suddenly got up, and went to him, and put her hand upon his shoulder, and he could smell the delicious feminine odor of her body, and feel the soft touch of her hair against his cheek.

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Then I am safe."

"Safe? Are you in danger?"

"Yes. No. I do not know."

"Elfrieda, I am anxious about you."

"It is nothing," she said, going back to her chair.

"I cannot bear to think of you being in danger."

"You must n't be alarmed."

"But I am, I cannot be easy in my mind. Is there no way I can help you?"

She shook her head, doubtfully. They sat in silence. Then she said:

"It was a great joy to us all to know that your heart was with the Fatherland."

"You could not know that. I would not write about the war in my letters to you."

"We heard."

"Heard?"

"It is what the reports said."

"Reports? What reports?"

"I do not know. I was told so."

"Told what?"

"That at heart you were a German. That you were with us."

"I was at first."

"I do not understand."

"When the war broke out everything was confused. I was swept off my feet and I wanted Germany to win. It was the blood call, and there is no reason in it. I made myself believe that Germany did not will the war, although I knew better."

"Knew better?"

"Certainly. Officers of the German navy told me more than five years ago that Germany was getting ready to strike. Still, I did not think she had started it. I forced myself to believe that England began it!"

"England did start it," said Elfrieda, her face suddenly flaming with passion.

"I compelled myself to believe this at first. I knew that the British navy was ready in the North Sea when the hour struck."

"It is all that saved England," said Elfrieda, passionately.

"But you just now said that England started the war."

"She did."

"Then why do you say that the presence of the British fleet in the North Sea is all that saved England?"

She was silent.

"Don't you see, Elfrieda, it is n't logical. That is the trouble with the German arguments, they are not logical. Every time your brain comes up against a stone wall of fact."

"England was ready," insisted Elfrieda.

"England has been ready on the sea for three hundred years."

"She had a secret treaty with Belgium," said Elfrieda, doggedly.

"Discovered when the German army reached Brussels."

"You are trying to trap me."

"No, I am not. I want to help you see."

"God will punish England," said Elfrieda, intensely. "Billy! They are even poisoning the wells."

"Who?"

"The English. They are killing our men, who are fighting for the Fatherland, like rats."

"Frieda," replied Billy, "I have known Englishmen ever since I went into the navy. I have worked with them, played with them, fought with them. They are the finest sportsmen in the world. I believe that an Englishman would give a mad dog a sporting chance for its life. The Englishman has n't been born who would poison a well. It is n't in his code. I know, and must bear witness."

"Everybody in Germany knows they have poisoned wells," cried Elfrieda, passionately.

"Does everybody in Germany know about the French and Belgian girls carried off from their homes like cattle to be the wretched playthings of the fighting men?" he said slowly.

"It is not true. It is an English lie. General von Heidenreich would not permit it. He has done a great constructive work in Belgium; everyone knows it."

"Von Heidenreich," said Billy, "is the man on whose account my father left his home. His name has been a shame to me for all my life. I never knew, when I was still a boy, the mystery of it all, but things have come to me, the memory of my father's words, the reason why my mother stayed behind when we moved here. . . . My mother! Von Heidenreich, he is a beast, I would believe anything of him. I know these horrors, all of them, are true."

"The women of Germany would not permit it. It is a lie, an English lie."

"There are some things the women of Germany are not permitted to know. Some day they will learn, they must learn, and it will break their hearts."

"There are, I suppose, some bad men in the world," she faltered.

"Individual cases might be put down to the degeneracy of a few abnormal men here and there, but when whole villages of girls are driven off before their masters there is but one explanation, it is deliberate, organized."

"You do not talk like a German," she said faintly.

"I — I — I am talking like a man," said Billy, slowly. "I love you so, Elfrieda, I love all women in you. Whatever any man does to one of them he does to you — and to me."

She hung her head, not daring to look at him, her lip trembling. Presently she said:

"It can't be true, Billy, as a German woman I know it can't be true."

"What do you believe as an American woman?"

"An American?" she asked, startled.

"You were born in this country. Have you ever been naturalized a German subject?"

"No."

"Then you are an American."

"Yes, I know," she answered slowly, "I have thought of that, sometimes. I am not quite like Charlotte, and Greta, and Helena. I *feel* it. They are Germans — but I am for Germany," she finished, in a voice shaking with emotion, "for Germany, with all my heart, and all my soul."

"Yes, dear, against England, and Russia, and even France, if you wish."

"Against — everything!" she cried, her little white hands clenched until the blue veins stood out on them like knots.

Billy smiled at her, half sadly, half quizzically, and pointed through the window.

Over the rooftops, far away across the town, on the flagpole upon the top of a tall building, the Stars and Stripes fluttered in the March breeze against the blue spring sky.

"That, Frieda," he said, "is your flag — against everything. It is because it is, in spite of all your heart and all your soul."

CHAPTER XV

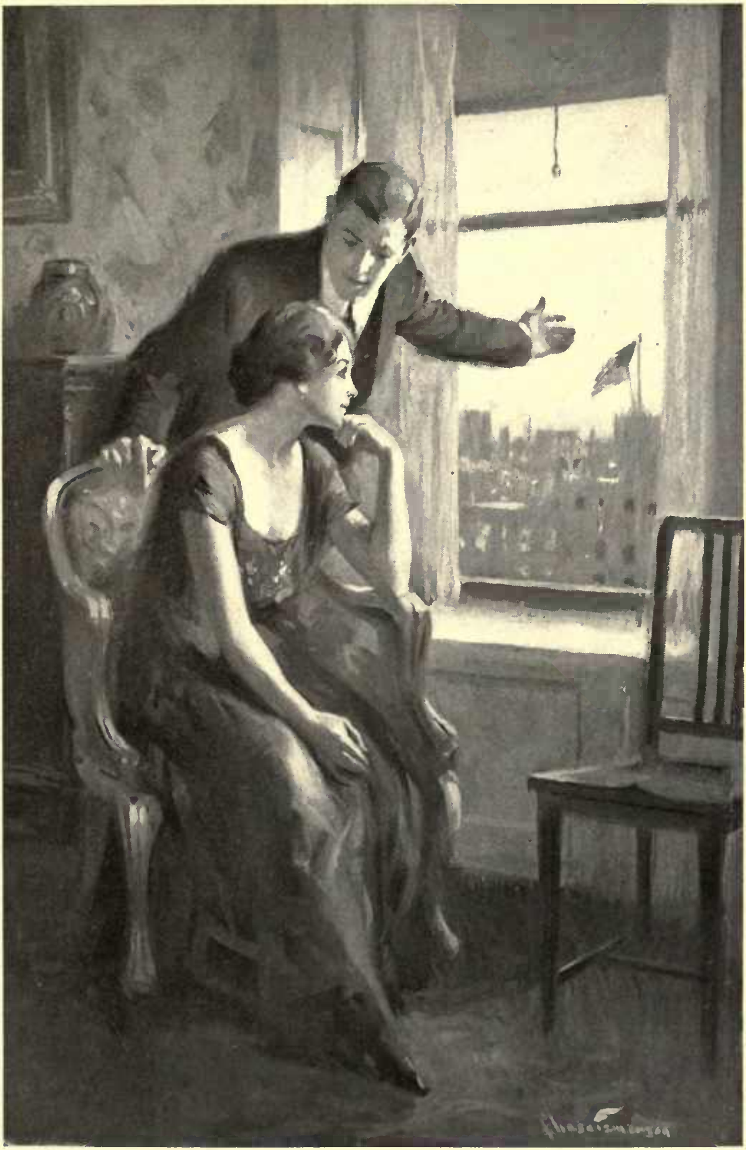
ELFRIEDA HAS AN IDEA

Billy had begun some work at the Department upon the science to which he had devoted the best years of his life, strategy. He had conceived and worked out problems far in advance of those in the course at Newport, and he had acquired from intimate friends in the British navy, in many a social hour on shipboard, some of the things that English fleet commanders had done in actual manœuvres, and in battle.

He had the same instinct for this that makes the born chess player.

Many of the officers who had served with him knew what he had done already, what he might do if given the opportunity. Just when Billy had despaired of being called upon, of being utilized in any practical way, he was called into consultation, without actually being placed upon the board of strategy.

To his friends he voiced some of the fears that constantly arose in his mind. If war were declared would it be followed by fighting?



"That, Frieda," he said, "is your flag—against everything"

PAGE 171

"Will the fleet," he asked Wallis, who had been attached to operations, "co-operate with the British fleet?"

Nobody knew.

Suppose the North Sea fleet were defeated, or the German fleet should break through into the Atlantic, would that fleet be met at sea, or would the American fleet be called in to protect the coast cities?

Nobody knew the answer to that.

Who was to determine what the fleet would do?

Senator Marshfield brought the matter up one afternoon. He had been to the Department, and had succeeded in having a constituent appointed a Passed Assistant Paymaster. Billy met him at the door, as he was going out, much pleased with himself. They walked down the street together, the Senator smiling, Billy's face drawn about the mouth and eyes.

"Things are going fine," said Senator Marshfield.

"Do you still think that we shall have war?" asked Billy.

"Oh, yes, in a way," replied the Senator, selecting a cigar with much care. "In a way. Great idea, we have now."

"About what?"

"We 're going to help France. That won't get anybody sore. Old friendship, and all that sort of thing. Nobody will resent what we do for France."

"An army?" asked Billy, interested.

"Not if we can help it," replied Senator Marshfield. "Money. Nobody can make a military reputation writing a check."

"We ought to send an army to France if we really mean to help," insisted Billy.

"The public may clamor for it. If we can't risk ignoring it we'll have to send a division, about twenty thousand men, say, regulars, and the ideal man, if we can find him, will command it."

"The best major-general we've got," said Billy, eagerly.

"Hell, no," laughed Senator Marshfield — "the poorest politician. He'll be absolutely safe, see? Then we'll organize an army for the moral effect in Europe and America. There'll probably be a million men in uniform in this country next summer."

"The khaki for the first hundred thousand of them has n't been woven yet," said Billy, bitterly. "What'll you put the other nine hundred thousand in, pink silk kimonos?"

"We can go into the open market and buy anything we want," said Senator Marshfield, grandly. "We have unlimited resources."

"You have n't seen your resources stacked up alongside your liabilities yet," answered Billy, shrugging his shoulders. " What will Congress do about the war?"

" Well," said Senator Marshfield, taking his cigar from his mouth, and regarding it reflectively, " of course we 've got to hang our clothes on a hickory limb — but we won't go near the water, not if I can help it."

Billy spoke of a possible military and naval movement there had been much talk about in the newspapers.

" Dangerous," said Senator Marshfield, shortly.

" It 's the only thing to do," said Billy, with more than his usual heat, " and we 've got to play the British way, too," he added. " It is n't dangerous; it 's the only safe thing to do."

" You don't grasp the point," laughed Senator Marshfield. " You forget the Irish vote. We could n't do a more dangerous thing. Most of the Irish in this country hate England, and for that matter, so did most of the descendants of the old English stock until the European war began. We 've been feeding our people on it for years in the school books, and you can't undo that in a day. There 'd be a howl if we helped England, and the people would get even at the polls. We 'll help France, that 's safe."

"Surely we 've got over our Fourth Reader days," said Billy.

Senator Marshfield patted him on the arm. "Son," he smiled, "what kind of newspapers do the people read nowadays, the great masses of the people, I mean? Two or three screaming headlines, and the rest comic pictures. That 's the class we 're thinking about. They go to the polls every election day, rain or shine. They don't think."

"If you mean to cast any slur on the patriotism of the people — "

"Oh, not that, exactly," interjected Senator Marshfield.

"You ought to look over the enlistment figures," said Billy. "The country is full of enthusiasm. It 's far ahead of the government. The people want the government to lead, not to throw cold water. Some of the things they are doing are splendid, perfectly splendid."

"It 's love of excitement, adventure," said Senator Marshfield.

"It 's patriotism," insisted Billy.

"You don't talk like a German-American," said Senator Marshfield, turning to look at him curiously.

"By God, I am not a German-American," Billy almost shouted.

"For Heaven's sake, then, what are you?" demanded Senator Marshfield in amazement.

"I 'm an American," said Billy, "a — a regular American."

"You have n't been out home lately," said Senator Marshfield. "You have n't been living in our State for the past two and a half years. I don't know where you 've been getting your ideas."

"I 've been getting them on the deck of a United States warship," said Billy, the blood in his face. "It 's a great place for ideas, Senator."

"I 'm in closer touch with the people," said Senator Marshfield. "I have good reasons for all my plans, if you do know more about fourteen-inch guns."

"Do you know what one of those big guns could do to your plans if it were fired?" asked Billy. "Blow 'em out of water!"

He went to Elfrieda, high strung, nervous, and found her moping at Mrs. Winters' window. There was something in her eyes that made him say quickly:

"Homesick, dear?"

"No; not that exactly, just sad, that 's all. But you must n't call me 'dear,' someone might hear you."

"Can't I call you 'dear' when we are alone?"

"Y — yes, I — I suppose so, Billy."

"You remember the promise I made you, the last day we spent together, in the *Tiergarten?*"

"Yes."

"You made me promise that I would not make love to you again until you had become a famous singer."

"I remember."

"Has n't the war changed that, does n't it relieve me of my promise?"

"The war?"

"It puts everything so far away. It has interrupted your studies, spoiled your career — no, no, dear, I don't mean that. I mean it — it has put the goal farther away, that 's it, just moved the goal a little farther away. And I don't want to wait. Elfrieda, dear, I love you the same as I always have. I 've always loved you. I loved you the night I saw you slip through the folding door, that night I came to your mother's house, and I have loved you every day of my life since then. I have never wanted any other woman, Elfrieda, but oh, I do want you."

"You 're breaking your promise," she said, turning away.

"Let 's not wait, Elfrieda," he begged. "Life is so short. You could still study, and sing, if we were married. I won't demand all of you, Elfrieda. Have your career, gratify your ambition, I 'll only ask for part of you, Elfrieda, the part that 's left."

" There 's more than that between us now," she said, looking at him again through half-closed eyes.

He cried out, startled: " Is there — is there someone else? '

" I mean the war."

" The war shan't come between us, Elfrieda."

" It has come already. It *is* between us. I can feel it, like a great, black — something dreadful."

She buried her face in her hands, and her slender body trembled, but when she raised her head again there were no tears upon her cheek, and her eyes were hot and dry.

" It shan't come between us," he cried passionately. " Why should it? It is a nightmare to all the world, but we will keep it from becoming a nightmare to us. We will push it away from us, you and I, dear."

" I mean the — the war between Germany and the United States."

" Oh."

" That is what is between us."

" You and I are Americans, Frieda."

" I am afraid that I had forgotten it, all these years."

" You must remember it."

"I have as much right to be a German as you have to be an American. I must be a German, Billy, I must, I must!"

"You were born here, under that flag out there."

"If that makes me an American, the fact that you were born in Prussia makes you a German."

"It — it is different."

"It is the same thing."

"Frieda! Stop! You must not put such ideas in my mind."

CHAPTER XVI

THE PATHWAY TO A STAR

"The phonograph is a wonderful little thing, but it does n't satisfy the artistic temperament," said Corrie one afternoon. "Miss Fralli is longing for a piano."

"Why don't you come down to my apartment?" said Billy, eagerly. "I 'd love to have you, for I am wild for some music myself. Lawson has a little grand, and although I have not tried it, I am sure it would satisfy even Miss Fralli."

"Perfectly adorable idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Winters with enthusiasm. "Come along, honey," she smiled, putting her arm around Elfrieda's waist, "I 'm dying to hear you sing. Anyone who has sighed for a piano as you have must be a real artist."

Frieda clapped her hands joyously. Corrie said to her maid: "If Captain Farquhar calls, tell him we are all down in Commander Hartmann's apartment."

"What Farquhar is that?" asked Billy.

"Army Farquhar," replied Corrie. "He 's a dear," she added, turning to Elfrieda, "you 'll adore him. He has just been ordered to Washington, staff duty. Fancy, keeping a man like that in Cheyenne! He said he would drop around this afternoon, but you know how things are now. I 'm afraid that if this war with Germany does come it will make men awfully scarce." She led the way downstairs.

Elfrieda sat down at the piano and began to sing "Elsa's Dream." She broke off in the middle of it, with a shrug of the shoulders, and started to play Chopin. Mrs. Winters' maid came in.

"There is a telephone call for you, Madame," she said.

"Tell Central to put it on here. What 's your number, Billy?" asked Corrie.

"It 's a long-distance call, Madame — New York."

"Oh! I 'm sorry, people, but I 'm afraid I must leave you. Long distance is not to be denied." She waved her hand to them at the door, and was gone.

"Do you remember how I used to hate Chopin, Billy?" said Elfrieda, turning to him with a smile. "I said there was n't any music in him. I am beginning to think now that he has more than all the others put together."

She started off again, in a lighter mood. She sang half way through the "Habannera," and got up with an impatient gesture.

"I don't know what's the matter with me. I am miserable away from a piano, and when I get to one I am all out of mood. It won't come. Can't sing. Everything as hard as nails. You don't know what it means, Billy, to long for something, and never seem to reach what you are after."

"I do, Frieda. God knows I do — are you going to hold me to the promise, dear?"

"Sometimes I seem to see it just at hand," she went on quickly, "and then I'm elated, not happy. At other times I see all my life given up to this striving and straining after something I am never to attain. Youth passing, without the joy of youth. Love pushed aside. Motherhood denied — and then I come to a gray and withered middle age, like Charlotte, teaching and grinding away until the night folds down in a merciful release from all I've made myself, or never made myself."

Billy started toward her, joy leaping in his eyes. He thought it meant surrender, but she threw out her hands, and walked over to the window. She snapped up the shade, and stood there, framed against the light, her back toward him.

"Don't think I'm giving up because I say all this to you. I 've said it to myself before, and gone back and struggled on. I don't always feel like this. What I need is to get back to Ruhlmann. She would soon batter me into shape. But that can't be. There is no place for that now. Yet it is what I long for. I would never have to think then. She does all the thinking for the people she is guiding along the way to opera. Up at seven — bang! — when the knock comes. Cold bath, that takes the thoughts out of you. Callisthenics, dress, eight o'clock breakfast of gruel and zwieback. If my thought apparatus works, I long for a cup of coffee, and a roll — and oh! a grapefruit! But usually it does n't. Eight-thirty to nine-thirty, fresh air, alone, no lolling along, and no thinking, swing out and back again, just breathing. Then scales and scales, and tones and tones, and trills and scales and scales and tones. Then diction with Fräulein, French, German, Italian. Drink it in, but don't think! Rest. Lunch — one chop, one potato, salad with just oil and salt, one piece of bread. More rest. More scales, more tones, then rôles, over and over and over, and then, when everything comes right, sometimes I am happy. Then Ruhlmann kisses me, and says I am her own dear child, and that we must wait only a little longer. It all seems very near, then."

" It is n't a normal way to live," said Billy. " It 's too much work and no play. You 've shut out everything from your life but your music — you 've shut out me."

" Music is what I need," she said. " It 's my life and I have to live it. I must get back — why am I here — why did I ever come ? " and she looked at him with moist eyes suddenly full of doubt, and trouble. The tears were near, but Elfrieda fought them back, and the smile came out, and sent them scurrying.

" Sing to me again," said Billy.

" Do you want to hear me ? "

" More than anything in the world, dear."

She started " Elsa " again.

" Not that, sing me something from my youth," he said. " There was a little song you used to play when you were a child. I can see you now, sitting up so straight and rebellious, swearing you would n't sing, but going right on with it just the same, strumming the piano with one eye on your music and the other on the clock."

" I 'm afraid that 's rather indefinite," smiled Elfrieda. " That 's the way I used to play everything then. It is a wonder, looking back, that I should have gone as far as I have."

" It was Aunt Lottie," said Billy.

" She did not put this gnawing ambition in me."

"She knew it was coming, and made you ready for it. You owe a lot to that little song. How your mother drove you at it."

"Can't you think what it was?"

"No. Wait!" He began humming.

"It is the first song I sang for Ruhlmann," she said, and began to sing, very softly:

> Ach, wie ist's möglich dann, dass ich dich lassen kann:
> Hab' dich von Herzen lieb, das glaube mir!

"That 's it," cried Billy, looking at her with hunger in his eyes. "I can see you in the very little blue dress you used to wear, singing away through your tears of rage, only you would n't sing it in German then. Aunt Lottie could n't force you to do it. It used to make the family wild."

She was laughing with him now. "I remember, I remember," she said joyously. "Oh, Billy, those were happy days." She sang the words then in English:

> How can I leave thee, while I do love thee so?
> Thou art my all in all, truly my own!
> Thou hast this soul of mine so firmly lock'd in thine,
> That my heart e'er will be thine, love, alone.

"Frieda," he said suddenly, "let 's go away together, and spend a whole day in the country, a day like the last one we spent in the *Tiergarten.*"

She jumped up, shouting, and clapping her hands like a child. "Billy, you do think of the grandest things."

"Then you 'll go?"

"It will be glorious, a whole day, out in the woods and the fields, and maybe we shall find some flowers. The spring is coming on. There are robins in the park, and in the open country I 'm sure there will be meadow larks."

"You 're just as fond of birds as ever, are n't you, dear?"

"I love them all," said Frieda. "I always did. Do you remember the frozen sparrow you brought home one day, and how I nursed it, and what a pest it became?"

"I remember everything about you," he said simply, "everything."

"The horse trough, where you threw my books. I can picture you now."

"There is n't a thing about you, in the old times, that I can't see as vividly as if it were today. I remember every dress you ever wore, the very ribbons in your hair."

She sat with her slim, delicate hands in her lap, her head bent toward him, a smile in her eyes and on her arching lips.

"You are a queer one, Billy," she said. "You really seem to care for me, to think of all those things."

"Care for you! Frieda, I'm mad for you. The fire that you kindled in me long ago is burning as fiercely now as it did then. I sometimes feel that it will consume me." He started up, and went to her.

There was something in his eyes that made her raise her hand. The eyes that could at times be cold as ice now brimmed with tenderness that grew to mellow love-light as she looked, then turned to flaming passion. She dared not have him near her with those eyes.

"Remember your promise, Billy," she laughed, and put the big divan between them.

He sank into a chair, shaking, and raised his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"Are you going to let this music kill us both, girl?"

"Not kill us, Billy, purify us, exhalt us."

"I am no Stoic. I do not want to crucify myself on an unattainable ideal. I want to strive, to reach the heights if I can, but I want to live by the way. I want you."

"I'm with you in the spirit, Billy dear, and have been always," she said.

"I don't want you with me in the spirit. I want you with me in the flesh, all the time, day and night, today, tomorrow. I 've wanted you all the yesterdays, and you would n't come to me. I want your hair, and eyes, and arms, I want all of your beautiful self to love like a man and not like a saint, I want you, Frieda, you, you, can't you understand?"

"The promise! the promise, Billy, you 're breaking your promise. Can't you see that I must n't let you talk to me like this?"

"Why not? It 's my love. I 've nurtured it a thousand nights at sea, under the stars. It 's been all that I 've had, but my work, and that has been a symbol of my love. It 's mine, I tell you, it has been mine for years, and I have a right to do with it as I please, I have a right to give it to you."

"But I have no right to take it, Billy, can't you see?"

"I can't, God knows I can't."

"My pathway leads me to another star than yours, Billy. We go by different ways, and I can only greet you from afar, and wish you well."

"We could go on together."

"That could not be."

"It could."

"Would you give up your work for me, Billy? Would you give up your career?"

"The navy?" he asked, looking up quickly.

"That is your career."

"I could not give that up," said Billy, "it is all I have, all I know."

"So is music all that I have, all that I know."

"There is a difference."

"Not the slightest."

"You would not have to give it up."

"One has to give up everything for music, Billy. The way is long and hard, and one must travel all alone."

"I would not ask you to give it up, dear," he said, steadying his voice. "I require no sacrifice of you, I only want just you. You could sing, and satisfy the longings of your soul, and some day reach the heart's desire, and we could be together when the fates were kind to us, and have each other for a little while at least before we go."

She answered him at the piano, and as she sang a great contentment came to him, and he was happy to be near her.

She sprang up in the middle of a note, and danced toward him with her hands outstretched.

"We 'll go in the car, Billy, out into the country, and when we have ridden far away from the city, far away from everything — "

" We 'll get out, and take a long walk in the woods."

" And pick flowers."

" And hear the birds sing."

" And cross a little brook, and watch the tadpoles turning into baby frogs."

" And have our dinner at some farmhouse."

" And — and — "

" Talk about ourselves."

" That 's what I was trying to say."

" And you will release me from my promise? "

" Ah — "

" Just for one day, one little day? " he pleaded.

" And you will be good forever after? "

" If I must."

" Then for one day."

" You are an angel."

" We shall go in the morning."

" Bright and early."

" Oh, I forgot. We shall have to ask Mrs. Winters."

" That 's so. You are her guest. Confound it! "

She looked at him keenly, sideways through her narrowed eyelids. " You would n't want to take Mrs. Winters? "

" And spoil everything? " he demanded. " We must find some way — "

She smiled at him, a deep peace somewhere in the heart of her, and put her arm upon his shoulder, just as Mrs. Winters came gaily in.

"Awfully sorry to have kept you waiting," she said, and added to herself, as she glanced at the two flushed and eager faces before her, "how time does fly with some people!"

Billy and Frieda murmured their guilty regrets.

"Awfully important call," explained Corrie. "I 'm sorry, but I must go away this evening. You won't mind, will you dear?" she asked, turning to Miss Fralli.

"I shall miss you, of course," said Elfrieda, "but I shall get along quite all right, I 'm sure."

"I 'll look after her," Billy hastened to say, his face beaming. "We have planned to take a little trip into the country one day soon."

"It 's too bad you won't be able to go with us," said Elfrieda, "we 're going to have such a jolly time."

"I may be back," replied Corrie, slowly, looking at Billy.

"Oh! I do hope so," Elfrieda smiled.

"Here I am going to Namaschet on Hannibal G. White's business," thought Corrie, "and neglecting my own. This looks like a bad time to be leaving an Italian temperament loose."

CHAPTER XVII

A WILDCAT IN A CAGE

Mrs. Winters missed one train in New York, and another one in Boston, so that it was nearly six o'clock when she stepped out on the platform of the little station, and looked about her, at the white steeple of the church, and the broad main street of the town curving off to the left between two lines of gnarled and aged trees.

Mrs. Sabiston met her with a runabout, and drove her to " Rock Crest." She was cordial and gracious, and nobody would have imagined, to see them laughing and chatting like old friends, that the two women had never met before.

At the iron gate which guarded the Sabiston estate, Margaretha herself got out, and closed it, and locked it; then stepped back into the car. They rode through the woods, and Corrie thought it was a wild and unattractive place, until they passed the stable and garage, and came out on the driveway in front of the house, on the high plateau at the top of the cliff. The sweep of the blue sea, tumbling and roaring against the rocks below, fascinated her, and when they had entered the drawing room, and Mrs. Sabiston left her for a moment, she went to the window, and looked out across the broad piazza upon the vast expanse of billows spreading out, as far as the eye could see, to the hazy sky-line where cloud and ocean blended in a shade of gray that Corrie thought would be adorable in a gown.

They dined alone, at seven, although she sensed the presence of other persons in the house, and wondered who they were, and why they did not join them at table, and at the fireside in the drawing room afterwards.

They talked of everything, except the business affairs of Mr. White, that Corrie had come to talk about, of the Far East, of Paris, and Berlin, and Mrs. Winters discovered that Mrs. Sabiston also was a woman of the world.

They went to bed at ten o'clock, and Corrie dropped off to sleep almost immediately, for she was tired after her long trip.

She had breakfast alone, in her room, and it was nearly eleven o'clock when she went down to the drawing room, which Mrs. Sabiston used as a living room, still feeling that delicious drowsiness inspired by the sea.

Mrs. Sabiston was in an arm chair by the fire, reading the morning papers, a pile of which lay on the floor beside her. She picked them up, and put them down upon a small table, in an alcove, where there was a telephone and writing materials, and then hurried forward to welcome her warmly.

And then she turned, to introduce to her a man who had left his deep chair by the fire, and who crossed the room with a long, quick, free-swinging stride.

Corrie suppressed an exclamation of surprise as she took the narrow, sinewy, long-fingered hand he held out to her, and started as he smiled and said:

" I am very glad to meet you, Mrs. Winters."

Where had she seen that smile, heard that voice before? She looked at him more closely, and saw a tall, long-limbed, blue-eyed, blonde man, with a high, arched nose, and a strong, firm mouth.

He wore a heavy beard, and it was quite evident that he was German, although he spoke without an accent. This must be the man Mr. White had told her about, but it was certain she had never seen him before, for Corrie's mental card-index of men had never failed to catalogue everyone she had ever met. Yet he reminded her strongly of some one she had known, but whose name and face eluded her memory.

"Captain von Hagenah is very busy," explained Mrs. Sabiston, "and if you are willing, he would like to speak with you at once." She turned, as if to leave them.

"Do not go, Mrs. Sabiston," he said quickly, "I may need your assistance, as you are familiar with much of this business."

Mrs. Sabiston inclined her pretty head, and took a seat near the fire, warming her hands at the blaze, for though the room was not cold, she was very lightly clad in a plain dress of silk, that fell from her bare throat to the turn of the calf of her leg in a long, graceful line, as soft as a cobweb.

Corrie sat down.

"If you please, Mrs. Winters," said Captain von Hagenah, crisply, "let us get this business over with as quickly as possible. Time is precious."

He opened a large leather bag which Corrie had noticed on the floor, by the chair where he had been sitting, and placed upon the table in the middle of the room several bundles of papers.

"My letters!" exclaimed Corrie.

"Do you recognize them?" he laughed.

"I ought to," she said, picking up several, and examining them, "they are the letters I wrote to Mr. White."

"Admirable letters, Mrs. Winters," he said.

" Admirable in every way. They contain just the information we wanted."

" I did not expect any one else to have my letters," said Corrie, slowly, her forehead in a frown. " Here are some I had quite forgotten about."

" Your first report, so far as I can judge by the papers I have here, and I am supposed to have a complete file of them, was made ten years, eight months and sixteen days ago," said von Hagenah, glancing at a date.

Mrs. Winters seized the letter he held out to her, and looked at it.

" Heavens! " she gasped, " how the years do slip by, Mrs. Sabiston."

" Really," said Mrs. Sabiston, languidly, " I had n't noticed it."

Corrie smiled sweetly, with her lips closed. Inside her mouth she was secretly biting her tongue.

" That is the first time," she thought, " that a woman ever put one over on me like that," and Mrs. Sabiston, without in the least realizing it, had made an enemy, and sharpened that enemy's wits.

" If you will examine these reports, Mrs. Winters," said von Hagenah, " you will find that they cover some forty-odd officers in the American navy most minutely. There are some additional details that I require, and these I desire to obtain from you personally."

"I understood it was something like that," said Corrie, doubtfully. "Mr. White called me on the long-distance, and asked me if I would n't run down here to see a friend of his. He had arranged for me to come some time ago, and Mrs. Sabiston had invited me, but I presume," she added, looking over toward the fireplace, "that she has been ill."

"I was delayed," explained von Hagenah, and Mrs. Sabiston smiled at Corrie.

"I thought from what he told me," said Corrie, "that Mr. White would be here too. I don't like to talk about these things to strangers."

"Talking to me is precisely as though you talked to him," said von Hagenah, suavely.

"Indeed?" said Corrie. "It does n't seem quite the same to me."

"It is, I assure you."

"The information I gave to Mr. White was — well, quite confidential."

"Very confidential, Mrs. Winters."

"Very well, ask your questions, and I shall try to answer them."

"You have some reports here on Waltermeyer. The last one was six — no, five months and three days ago, at Honolulu. He was still gambling heavily, his wife was living beyond his means, and he was deeply in debt. He was born in Wisconsin, and appointed to the Naval Academy from North Dakota. He is of German descent, Hessian stock. Admirable report."

"Well," asked Corrie, "what more do you want to know about him?"

Von Hagenah passed quickly around the table, and looked intently into her eyes.

"Where on earth," thought Mrs. Winters, "have I known this man?"

"Confound it!" said von Hagenah, "I really hate to do this sort of thing, but from what you know of Captain Waltermeyer — is his financial condition such — could he be reached that way, for say ten, fifteen, twenty thousand dollars?"

"What a remarkable question," said Mrs. Winters. "Mr. White never asked me things like that. Why, I don't think that question is proper at all. I never heard of such a thing."

"It is one of the questions I desire to ask, and I want an answer."

Corrie's cheeks pinkened. She fell to studying the design in the rug.

"No, Captain von Hagenah," she answered, looking up, "I 'm afraid not."

"Afraid? Are you certain?"

"Yes, I am certain. I don't think poor Walty could be reached in any way. You see, he committed suicide at Singapore about four months ago. I happened to be there at the time, and attended the funeral at the American consulate. I nearly cried my eyes out. He was a dear."

"Really, Mrs. Winters," said von Hagenah, brusquely, "I have n't time for trivialities. There are similar reports here as to other officers. Could any of them be reached?"

"Oh, yes," said Corrie, smiling sweetly, "I think nearly all of them could be reached."

"*Blitz!*" he cried eagerly, banging his fist upon the table. "How?"

"By cable," beamed Mrs. Winters, "or, if you are not in a great hurry, by mail."

Von Hagenah looked at Mrs. Sabiston helplessly. "You don't seem to understand me, Mrs. Winters," he went on after a pause. "Here is a report on Hollister much like the one on Waltermeyer."

"Oh, Hollister. He 's a dear, I assure you, a perfect dear."

"Financial condition very bad, cards, etc.," von Hagenah was reading.

"That 's true," said Mrs. Winters. "Still, I suppose I should n't have written that about dear old Hollister. He is positively the worst poker player I ever saw, and the most persistent."

"In debt?"

"Heavily. Always has been. Spends his money a year or so before he gets it. Owes everybody."

"Take Hollister, for instance," said von Hagenah, searching her eyes again. "Could he be reached with — money?"

"Reached? By whom?"

"Well, by White, say."

"Are you asking me if Hollister would take money from Mr. White, or anybody else he did n't know?"

"Precisely. Ten, twenty thousand dollars, say."

"Jimmy Hollister never borrows money from anybody but his friends," said Corrie, decidedly.

"This would n't be a loan, but a gift."

"He would n't do it," said Corrie, firmly.

"Not if he was, as this report shows, heavily involved financially?"

"Not if he owed the sum total of the entire poker debt of the United States Navy."

"You know him well enough to say 'no'?"

"I know him well enough to have said 'no' three times," smiled Corrie.

Von Hagenah looked at Mrs. Sabiston again and raised his eyebrows. He drummed upon the table for a moment with his knuckles, staring through the window at the sea, that was changing to a deep, slaty gray. His face was darker than the March sky. Presently he turned.

"About Hartmann, then?" he asked, lowering his eyes. "Lieut.-Commander Wilhelm Hartmann."

"Don't know him," said Corrie, shortly.

"You 've given us some highly interesting reports about him, Mrs. Winters. Two of the recent ones are dated at Shanghai, one at Manila and one at Honolulu. The last reports are a code cable from Hong Kong, and a code telegram from Washington announcing his arrival there."

"Oh, you mean Billy Hartmann," laughed Corrie. "For a minute I could n't think whom you were talking about."

"Those reports are gratifying — more gratifying to me than I could tell you, Mrs. Winters. You speak of his strong love for the Fatherland, his pronounced German sympathies."

"German!" said Corrie, raising her head quickly, and looking von Hagenah squarely in the eyes, "why, you *are* German, are n't you? I had almost forgotten that. And Mrs. Sabiston, you spoke to me so intimately last night of Berlin, surely, you are German, too."

"I am asking you about Hartmann," said von Hagenah, sharply. "Your reports on him are accurate? You know him?"

"Know him!" echoed Corrie, all smiles.

"You speak here of the coolness that has sprung up toward him in the American navy because of these German sympathies. He is for his Fatherland, Mrs. Winters?"

Von Hagenah took a swift step toward her, and she could hear him breathe.

"For the Fatherland?" she repeated. She put her head on one side, and wrinkled her forehead. "Umm, yes — and still — "

"He must be for his Fatherland," cried von Hagenah, throwing out his arms. "He must be! He must be! I feel it, I know it, my heart tells me that he is true to the land that gave him birth."

His voice was vibrant with exultation. Mrs. Sabiston had sprung to her feet, and she stood now, her head thrown back, her delicate nostrils quivering.

Over Corrie's aristocratic features there gradually spread a very blank expression that her friends knew and dreaded. It was her poker face. She covertly studied the two faces before her as she would have studied the faces across a card table. She suddenly stepped forward, her shapely body drawn up very straight and tense.

"For Germany!"

"Thank God," said von Hagenah.

"Yes! Yes! for Germany," said Mrs. Sabiston, her blue eyes glistening.

"For Germany?" repeated Corrie, the words in a question.

"For Deutschland!"

"So that is what you people are up to?" said Corrie, flashing a triumphant look at Mrs. Sabiston, as if to say, "you will 'put one over' on me, will you?"

"It is terribly stupid of me not to have seen through it at once. I shall certainly have to speak to our friend Mr. White about it. He has grossly violated my confidence. He should n't have sent me here. Why did he send me here? . . . I see it now, White 's a part of this, that 's it, there can be no other explanation. And I have been doing this for years and years." She stopped suddenly, and limply sank into a chair.

Von Hagenah was restlessly pacing the floor, scowling, doubling up his great fists, his body heaving with agitation and resentment. He stopped, and stood looking down at her.

"This has gone far enough, Mrs. Winters," he said, speaking rapidly. "We must reach an understanding. Let me repeat, what you tell me is told in confidence. It is precisely as though you dealt directly with White."

"I have no information for Germany," said Corrie.

"You need not try to drive a bargain, Mrs. Winters," he said icily. "It is not a question of money. You can name your own price."

"Price!" gasped Corrie, and the blood poured into her face, as though some one had lashed her with a whip. "Money!" she said, and fell to trembling.

"One would think you had never taken it," said von Hagenah, sarcastically. "Really, Mrs. Winters, you are rather over-doing it, you know."

"I shall not stay here to be insulted like this," said Corrie, and stood up, her whole body quivering.

"Tausend!" said von Hagenah to Mrs. Sabiston, over his shoulder.

"Mrs. Sabiston," said Corrie, ignoring him, looking through him, not in the least observing him, as though he had not been in the room at all, "will you kindly have the car come around for me? I'll wait at the station for the first train out."

Mrs. Sabiston's eyelashes fluttered, and she crossed her knees, but she said nothing. Corrie looked at her, and then was forced to turn to von Hagenah, who was smiling cynically.

"I want no money from Germany," she said. "Let that be understood between us. It is final."

She turned, and started to the door.

Von Hagenah, in three strides, reached it first, turned the key in the lock, and put it in his pocket.

"Mrs. Sabiston," said Corrie, "I must appeal to you. Will you kindly call the car?"

"For a woman who has been on the payroll of the German Secret Service, naval branch and Foreign Affairs branch, for nearly eleven years, you seem to have taken quite a sudden aversion to German money," said von Hagenah. He spoke to her as he would have spoken to a man.

"There is only one word in which to answer a charge like that," said Corrie. "It is a lie."

"Eleven years," mused von Hagenah, aloud, "and she waxes indignant. I never understood women, and never expect to."

"I never until now heard of the German Secret Service," said Corrie. Mrs. Sabiston was standing by the fireplace.

"You must have suspected what you were doing for White. Was he paying you all those years for nothing?" demanded von Hagenah, his blue eyes suddenly hard and cold, his voice a sneer.

" I sent him little scraps of information every now and then, yes," said Corrie. " About people — "

" And other things," said von Hagenah. " You gave us the best photographs we have of the Panama fortifications."

" Good God ! " cried Corrie, " did those go to the German Secret Service? Mr. White thought he would like to have some pictures of the guns down there, so I got a friend of mine to take me around. I had a little camera with me, and whenever I saw something that he seemed to brag about I got him to put me up on a gun, or something, and then he snapped me."

" Gescheit ! " said von Hagenah. " Mrs. Winters, you are a smart woman. You gave us the first information we had about the Copperton electrical fire control."

" I got that at a dance at the Mare Island navy yard one night," said Mrs. Winters. " One of my friends was talking about it, and I did n't understand, and he drew a sort of sketch of it on the back of my card for me. Mr. White wrote me that he was awfully interested."

" He was," said von Hagenah. " It was brilliant. Mrs. Winters, I don't know of any woman who has done better work along these lines than you have. You 've been one of the shrewdest spies we have had."

"Spy!" She sank to the floor, and buried her face in her hands.

"You 've given us the best information we have about the American navy and personnel. And we need it, now that war — "

"I did n't know, I did n't know," moaned Corrie, struggling to her feet. "So help me God I did n't know. I had to live. I did n't know what to do. Mr. White offered me a way to travel, to make money. He had large business interests in connection with the navy, he said, contracts and things. He was interested in it. He wanted to know all he could about it, about the men. I did n't think that what I told him was important. I did n't know I was betraying my country."

"Don't be theatrical, Mrs. Winters. Let us be practical. You shall have all the money you want, all the hats and gowns, and jewels. Everything a woman like you must have, without which life would be unendurable. There are two men I must reach through you. One is Hartmann, the other is Wallis. I want information, I want co-operation. And you can name your own price — and have it in gold."

"Mrs. Sabiston," said Corrie, "will you kindly call the car, or shall I walk to the station?"

She stood waiting for a moment, then threw back her head, and started toward the door.

Von Hagenah exchanged a glance with Mrs. Sabiston.

" She will cause trouble. She must not leave the house," his eyes said.

She nodded, that she understood.

Corrie tried the door, and came back by the table.

" Give me that key."

She looked from Mrs. Sabiston to von Hagenah, saw what was in their eyes, then turned, and ran to the window.

Von Hagenah was there first, and met her with his arm around her waist.

" Be reasonable, my dear Mrs. Winters."

She shook him off.

" We have paid you all these years. We have depended on you."

" You are a fool."

" You may name the sum, any sum."

" There has n't been enough money made," said Corrie. " I betray no more friends. From now on I shall try to undo the injuries I have done."

Her glance fell upon the table, covered with its litter of letters.

She sped across the room, made a basket of her dress, swept into it every scrap of paper there, and was at the fireplace in one swift, frantic bound. Into the flames she threw the literary production of eleven years, and they were curled and blackened cinders by the time von Hagenah and Mrs. Sabiston had dragged her away from the hearth where she crouched to shield them.

" There 's your information, Captain von Hagenah," she cried, " why don't you go up the chimney after it? "

" We shall have to intern her," said von Hagenah, shrugging his shoulders. " We can't let her go back to Washington, she 'll tell everything she knows to the first man she meets. Have you a room, Mrs. Sabiston? "

" I can make her very comfortable," said Mrs. Sabiston, not without a trace of humor.

" Lock her in," said von Hagenah, " and if necessary keep her confined for the period of the war."

" It 's quite impossible," said Corrie. " You 're too absurd. I must return to Washington. I have several important engagements."

" She will ruin me, war or no war," said Mrs. Sabiston, her slim, muscular body shaking with rage. " She will drive me out of the country."

" That is true," said von Hagenah. " You must be protected — at whatever cost. Keep her closely confined — for the present. You have a guard? "

"The six men who escaped from the interned ships at Norfolk. They are in hiding here."

"They will do. And remember, Mrs. Sabiston, this woman's presence in Washington would spoil everything."

"I shan't forget."

"Let me make one more appeal to you, Mrs. Winters," said von Hagenah. "Give me the information I want, promise me your co-operation in what I desire you to do, and you may put your hand in that bag, and take what you wish. In addition to that you shall be paid handsomely for having Hartmann made Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief. That was very clever of you, Mrs. Winters. Very prompt, very efficient. We owe you more than mere thanks for that."

If Captain von Hagenah had known Mrs. Winters longer he would have recognized the expression that was coming into her eyes, dominating her nose, shaping her rich, red mouth, as the one she invariably employed when about to crush somebody.

"It would be quite impossible to accept anything for that, Captain von Hagenah," she said, "because I had nothing to do with it. I merely suggested it to Senator Marshfield. He did it."

"Clever! I call it," said von Hagenah softly to himself. "Nevertheless, Mrs. Winters," he added, "you shall be paid, just the same. Put your hand in that bag, and take what you want."

From Corrie's eyes all the gray had vanished, leaving only the green. She ran quickly past him, and threw herself against the French window, opening out upon the east piazza, and the frame cracked beneath the impact of her weight. Von Hagenah caught her in his arms, and held her.

"Open the door, Mrs. Sabiston, and show me where to cage this wildcat."

"Down the hall, and up the stairway," said Mrs. Sabiston, and ran ahead.

Corrie struggled to free herself. Von Hagenah slipped his left arm beneath her knees, and held her closer to him.

"Let me go!"

Her eyes were close to his. She could feel his hot breath on her cheek and in her hair.

"Let me go!"

"Why not surrender—and let us be—friends?"

"You beast!" she said, and suddenly freeing her arm, slapped him across the cheek.

He laughed, tightened his hold upon her, and went lightly up the stairs, carrying her as easily as if she had been a child. In the hall above Mrs. Sabiston awaited them. At a door stood a man with a round, closely clipped head. His heels clicked, and his hand went to salute as von Hagenah came up.

" Keep this lady locked in this room," said von Hagenah, drawing Corrie more closely to him, " and set a guard. If she tries to escape, shoot her. If she does escape I 'll shoot you. Where 's the radio man? "

" Asleep, Herr Captain."

" Instruct him to keep in close touch with the base at Caribou Island. Mrs. Sabiston will be at the Willard, in Washington. You are not to use the telephone. Anything of importance should be communicated at once by wire, in code."

" I will get the new book," said Mrs. Sabiston. " It was changed last week." She ran lightly down the stairs.

Von Hagenah carried Corrie, struggling, into the room. He deposited her in a chair, kissed her impudently upon the lips, went out, and closed and locked the door. Then he joined Mrs. Sabiston in the drawing room.

" I shall have to go to Washington," he said.

" When? "

" At once. She has upset all my plans."

" It will be dangerous," she answered, with something in her voice that made him look at her narrowly.

"Perhaps, but I must get in touch with them there without delay."

"There are several trains this afternoon."

"I am afraid of trains."

"I had not thought of danger, except in Washington. You are so rash."

"The Secret Service —"

She smiled scornfully. "You are not in Germany," she reminded him. "They don't know how to do anything over here."

"You think you are not suspected?"

Mrs. Sabiston laughed merrily.

"I do not know," he said doubtfully, "the radio —"

"It is taken down every morning before dawn."

"Could anyone have seen us come in last night?"

"The sea and the cliffs have no eyes."

"I feel uneasy. This woman has disturbed me. It is a bad sign. I do not like the idea of the trains. The stations would be watched."

"You might go by automobile."

"Splendid. I shall go as your chauffeur. You will know the way, and ask the questions."

"It seems the best plan."

"You have Elfrieda's address?"

"I have Mrs. Winters' address. She is stopping with her."

"Then I shall go there, and you can remain at your hotel, in touch with me, ready to start back, at night, at a moment's notice."

"My car — everything I have — myself — all are at your disposal."

"You are splendid, Mrs. Sabiston. The Emperor knows of you, appreciates what you have done. . . . When shall we start?"

"Whenever you say, tonight, now. I am ready, and you can have your choice of cars."

"A touring car, high power. Can you provide me with a chauffeur's outfit?"

"Certainly."

"Very well — Margaretha, let us be off."

Half an hour later Mrs. Sabiston's car turned out of the gate of "Rock Crest" into the main road. At the wheel was von Hagenah, in leather and goggles. On the back seat with Mrs. Sabiston lay Bruno, his head in her lap.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAND OF YESTERDAY

"Every day should be like this one for us, dear," said Billy, when he found Elfrieda waiting for him at Mrs. Winters' door. "We ought to be together all the time, to have each other always, every day and every night, for the rest of our lives."

"You 're forgetting your promise, Billy," smiled the girl, raising her finger warningly.

"Why, don't you remember," said Billy, hastily, "there is n't any promise now? You released me from it, for one whole, glorious day."

"So I did. Well, are you ready?"

"The car is at the door. I telephoned for it early."

"Where shall we go?"

"I thought we would go down into Maryland, the Virginia roads are red clay, and muddier. You see, I 've thought of everything, and asked lots of questions. I shall have to report at the Department for a moment first."

They went down in the elevator, and Billy helped her into Lawson's car, and drove down Seventeenth street. At the Department he stopped, and got out.

"May I go in with you?" she asked.

"I 'd love to have you. Nobody is admitted now without a pass, unless he is known to the watchmen, but I can take you in with me."

They passed through the big west archway, turned into a door at the right, and walked along a dark corridor.

"This is the State Department side," he explained. "We turn to the left here, go up this flight of stairs, and here 's my office, second door to the right."

As they entered the small room, in which were two desks, a table, and a row of bookshelves, little Wallis got up quickly, and shook hands with them, and Billy saw that the man who was usually so shy with women could not keep his eyes from Elfrieda's pretty face.

"I suppose it will be all right for me to be away for today?" asked Billy; "that was the arrangement."

"So I understand; yes."

"Then I think I shall be going. Miss Fralli and I are spending the day in the country."

"Oh," said little Wallis, "I envy you — it — it is such a great day, such a wonderful day."

"Perfectly glorious," smiled Frieda.

"They 've given you my desk," said Wallis, his face a picture of gloomy despair as he looked into Frieda's dancing eyes, "and moved me over here. There 's a safe in it, and you will want the combination. I have written it out for you," he added, handing Billy a card.

"Thanks. I think I 'll put these papers in it now."

He tried the combination, opened the safe, and taking from his breast pocket a small black leather case, deposited it within, then closed the door, and took out his watch.

"I guess I 'll keep the combination in the back of this," he said, prying it open. A bit of paper fluttered out. Wallis stooped quickly, and picked it up. He could not help seeing what it was. They all saw it. Elfrieda looked quickly out of window, and Billy blushed. Wallis stammered an apology, as if he had been guilty of some crime, and the gloom deepened in his eyes. It was a picture of Elfrieda, in a dress with big balloon sleeves and a high-crowned hat covered with artificial flowers. The hat and gown had been out of style so many years that little Wallis thought they were the very latest thing. The girlish face might have been from a photograph taken that morning.

Billy put the picture back into his watch, with the combination of the safe, whereupon they shook hands with little Wallis, and went away, laughing, leaving a very disconsolate young naval officer staring at the closed door when they had gone.

"Where on earth did you get that picture, Billy?" demanded Frieda, when they were in the car, and he had turned through the Monument grounds into the Mall. "Give it to me at once, it 's a perfect fright."

"Don't you remember it?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"It was taken just before I went away to Annapolis. We went down to the photographers and had our photographs taken. Mine was in a huge standing collar that came up under the ears and nearly choked me to death. My shirtfront was covered by a big black silk tie that enveloped my chest like a muffler. I was wretchedly happy. You gave me your photograph and I gave mine to you."

She shook her head. "I had forgotten it," she said.

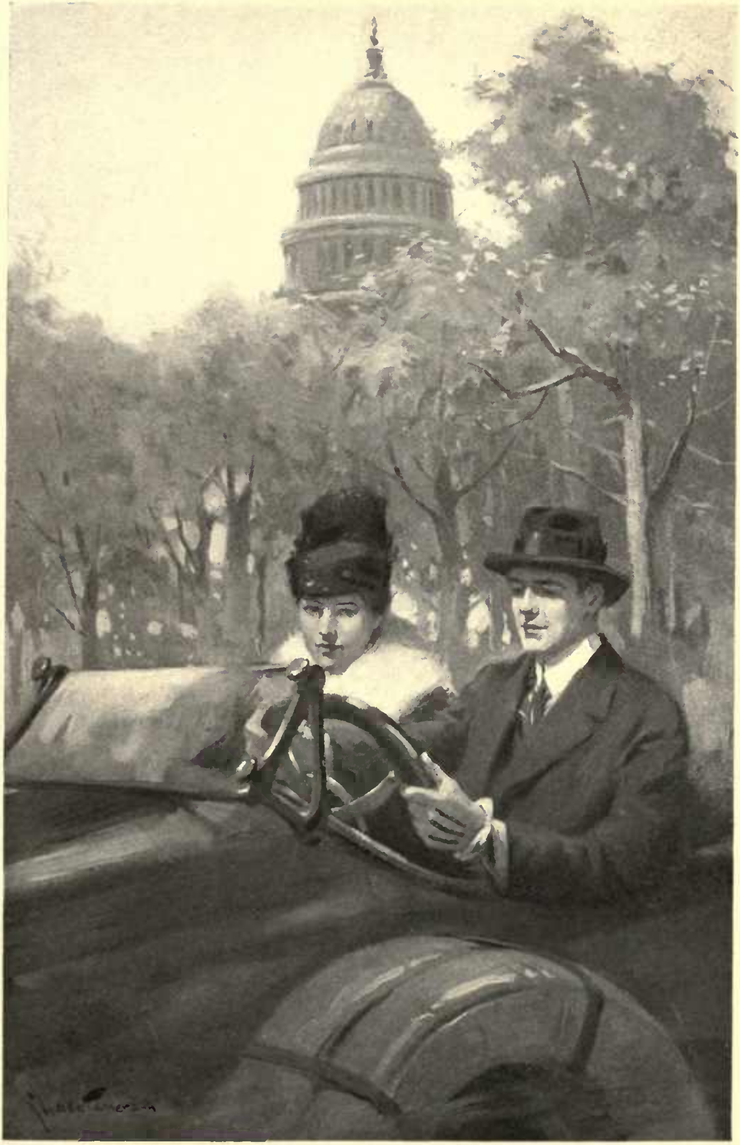
"I have kept yours," said Billy, simply. "All these years it has been in my watch. It has been next to my heart by day, and under my head by night. I have never been without it."

Elfrieda looked at him sideways beneath the brim of her black straw, then turned her head away. She could not face the look that lay in his eyes. Billy was trembling. He grasped the wheel more firmly, jumped the indicator, and broke the speed laws for a mile. They turned into the Capitol grounds, and flew along the long stretch of that inconspicuous part of Pennsylvania avenue that bisects the eastern half of Washington, crossed the bridge over the river and the railroad tracks, and the city was behind them. Without knowing or caring where he went, he followed the best roads as they opened up before him through the vistas of trees that were coming into life at the touch of spring.

The sweet, damp smell of open country flooded their thirsty lungs, intoxicated them with the perfume of bursting buds and steaming meadows. The sky above was cloudless, the air warm and amorous. Mating birds were singing their love songs in every thicket and hedge. Everywhere the earth was coming to life after its winter's sleep, and the green fields were streaked with great brown patches where the ploughing had already been done.

" Your eyes," said Billy, stealing a look at her under her hat, " are purple."

" It is the light," she laughed. " They are dark, like that, when the sky is a certain shade of blue."



She could not face the look that lay in his eyes

"They are beautiful, when they are purple — they are beautiful always."

"You always used to like it when the sky made them purple."

"It is not the sky," he answered, after a while, "it is your mood. I have seen them like that on a cold, gray day, when there was no sun, no blue, no warmth. It is your mood, your love mood."

"Stop, Billy."

"I shan't."

"You must."

"There is no such word in your vocabulary today."

"You are incorrigible."

He answered her by slipping his arm around her waist, and drawing her to him.

"You 'll upset the car."

"I shall, if you don't stop pushing my arm."

"Some one may see us."

"Here in this wild country?"

She could not argue with a man like that, and Billy had his way. The miles slipped by, and still he held her close to him. Growing tired, she moved, and put her arm around him, and heard him give a sigh of content.

"The country," he said, "appeals to me more than all the cities in the world. The country, and the sea. I should like to live on a wild, forest-grown island, with the sea beating on my own beach, and nobody there with me, but you, Frieda."

"Don't be sentimental."

"Take my left hand in yours, there. I want the touch of you. Would n't you like to share that island with me, dear?"

"There 's a meadow lark! Look, Billy, over in that field. I 'm sure it 's a meadow lark. Let 's stop, and watch it."

"Hang the meadow lark," said Billy. "Think of the sea, rolling up the beach, Frieda, a long, white beach, with sand dunes, and then the forest, oak and pine and — it would have to be a Southern island, and you would wear a soft, white gown and a big straw hat, and your eyes would always be purple, Frieda. Let us go find an island, dear."

"We shall have to go find some gasolene first," she laughed.

"Why — gasolene —?"

"The car stopped ten minutes ago."

"The deuce!"

"I 'm afraid so. See if you can start it, Billy."

"No use," he said, "it 's stalled."

"Touch some more of those little knobs and things; maybe it will run."

"No; it's the gasolene. I forgot about it. They should have attended to that at the garage."

"What on earth shall we do now?"

"Oh, just sit here and talk," said Billy.

"You are impossible, today."

"This is the greatest day of my life."

"Then we should n't waste it."

"Waste it?" he cried. "I don't know of anything I'd rather do than to spend it sitting right here with you, talking to you, looking into your purple eyes."

"Here in the middle of this town?"

"Town?" said Billy, astonished. "I had n't noticed it."

He looked around curiously now. To the right of them was a picket fence, from which most of the palings had disappeared. Beyond it was a weather-beaten house, with a long, sloping roof, on which all the shingles were curled up like little cornucopias. Down the road, ahead of them, were two or three more houses of the same forlorn appearance, and what had once been a barn. Its rough walls, defying all the natural and architectural laws, were standing at every possible angle from the perpendicular. Half the roof had caved in, and pigeons used the opening for an entrance. In the yard was a lean red cow, and looking over the fence at them a half-starved animal that Billy said was probably a horse. A pale and freckled boy came out of the stable, and surveyed them with interest, his eyes staring.

"Son," asked Billy, "what was the name of this town?"

"Sir?"

"When was it moved?"

"This is Piscataway," said the boy.

"Oh. Well, where 's the garage?"

"The which?"

"The place where they feed automobiles."

The boy shook his head.

"Is n't there a garage somewhere around?" insisted Billy, amazed that such a thing could be anywhere in America.

"Never heard of one, sir."

"Where can I buy some gasolene?"

"That 's a new one on me," said the boy, blankly.

"Look here, is n't there some kind of a store in this place?"

"There used to be a store. It fell down, and they never built a new one."

"Can we get luncheon somewhere?"

"Get what?"

"Something to eat."

"You might get something to eat in there, I dunno," said the boy, pointing to the dilapidated house.

"Not in that place, I could n't," whispered Elfrieda.

"I should say not. Son, is n't there a farm around here somewhere?"

"Oh, there 's a farm, yes, there 's a farm."

"How far?"

"I dunno."

"A mile?"

"I dunno."

"Two miles?"

"About two miles."

"Which way?"

"Over that hill, through the woods, and across the crick."

"The very tramp I 've been longing for," cried Elfrieda, joyously. "Have they a telephone up there?"

"Of course they have n't," chortled Billy. "This is the land of love and romance, the Land of Yesterday. I would n't use a telephone if they had one."

"All right, we 'll take a chance on the lunch," agreed Frieda.

They got out, and Billy pushed the car to the side of the road, and they left it there, climbed a fence, and started up the hill.

The ground was soft, but was covered with a heavy sod in which the new grass was showing, tender and green. They reached the top of the hill and sat down on a rock under a walnut tree.

"Tired, dear?"

"Not a bit, are you?"

"I could walk like this with you forever, to the end of the world."

She stood up quickly and they went along side by side, keeping at the edge of a woods.

"This is a path," said Elfrieda. "I wonder where it leads?"

"To Heaven," said Billy, and put his arm around her.

"You must n't," said Frieda, and tried to pull away. He answered her protest with a kiss, upon the lips, and the next instant he had her in his arms, and was covering her face with kisses, her eyes, her ears, her throat. His body was shaking.

"Stop! Billy," she gasped.

"The promise does n't bind today," he reminded her.

"You must n't kiss me like that, I — can't stand it."

"You 've starved me for years; all the days have been yours, but today is mine."

"You must n't kiss me like that," she repeated faintly.

"You said I might make love to you today."

"Yes, yes, talk to me, Billy."

"This is the only language I know. Kiss me, Frieda."

"Billy!"

"I love you so."

"I — I —"

"One kiss."

"Oh, Billy —"

"You 've never kissed me in your life."

"Why, you have kissed me, lots of times, when we were —"

"I know, but you have never kissed me, Frieda. Just once!"

"Will you be good, then?"

"Just one, Frieda!"

"You will be good?"

"Yes."

"Just one, remember — ever."

"You don't hate me, Frieda?"

"Oh, Billy."

"You don't mind kissing me? There is n't some one you would rather — I should n't care to kiss you, if you 'd rather —"

"Oh, very well then."

"There is some one else — some one in Germany?"

"Stop, Billy, you are hurting my wrists. No —" She looked off across the valley, toward the pine woods at the other side of the bottom lands, her eyelids nearly closed, the long lashes on her cheek. "No," she said slowly, "no, Billy, there is no one else in Germany. There might have been once — but he died."

Her voice fell to a whisper, but it sounded like the roar of a tempest in Billy's brain. His body, that had been trembling, was suddenly limp. He steadied himself, closing his long, sinewy fingers around a sapling.

"Frieda — I did not know. I did not understand. Forgive me. Can you ever forgive me?"

"Why, Billy, you are so pale."

"It is nothing. Shall we walk on?"

They walked in silence, keeping in the sheep path along the edge of the woods. Birds were singing in the branches of the leafing trees, but Billy did not hear them. Flowers started out of the mould and grass at his feet, but he did not see them. Something within him that he had had all the days of his life had suddenly been taken away. They came to a fence.

"I can climb it," said Frieda, gaily, "if you will give me your arm and let me put my hand on your shoulder."

"I will take the bars down for you," said Billy.

She waited while he put them up again, and walked along ahead of him, through an open field, up another hill, and through a bit of woods.

"Arbutus!" cried Frieda, and stooped to gather the tough vine, full of delicate pink blossoms. "And violets! Just look at the violets, Billy, wild ones."

"Shall I help you to find them?" he asked dully.

"Why, no," she answered, looking at him hesitatingly, "let them stay, it seems such a pity to pluck them, only to throw them away. Is n't that a house, down there?"

He nodded.

"Let us hurry on, then," and she danced merrily along before him, skipping about in the warm sunshine, looking into every bush, listening to the call of every bird. She stopped, and waited for him to come up. "I have spoiled his day," she thought. "What a fool I am, always to be doing things like that."

He held a wire fence apart while she climbed through, and they slid down a sloping hillside, slippery with wet leaves and moss.

"How in the world shall we get across?" asked

Elfrieda, with a little feminine scream of dismay, as she beckoned to him.

"A creek," said Billy, coming up. "Maybe there is a bridge somewhere."

They walked on. Presently Elfrieda said: "This is taking us further away from the house we saw. We must cross here, or we shall lose our way."

"Could you step on those stones?" he asked.

"They look terribly wet," said Elfrieda, critically. "The water is 'way over them in some places. I should ruin my shoes."

"They seem quite heavy and stout."

"And get my feet wet, and maybe take cold. I have to be so careful about my throat."

"We shall have to walk further. There must be a bridge."

"You — you could carry me?"

"Oh."

"It is not far across, Billy."

"Come along, then."

He stepped down the bank upon a flat stone, and reached up his arms to her, and she fluttered into them like a bird.

"Comfortable?"

"Quite."

He picked his way across the stream, from rock to rock. Once he slipped, and tightened his hold upon her. She thought, "He will kiss me now."

He put her down upon the opposite bank, and they walked up through the trees, and came out in an orchard. Ahead of them was a farm house, white, with a big red chimney. A dog came out to growl and remained to scamper at their heels. They opened a gate and went into a yard, and a woman, who was sitting on the porch, arose and welcomed them. Yes, she could give them a dinner, and would be delighted to do so. It would be ready in a few minutes. The lady could go into her room, and she would find everything she needed. She went ahead to show the way.

Billy waited for Frieda on the porch, rocking gloomily in a big, red, split-bottom chair. A man was shouting to a plough horse in a field across the way, and the robins were singing overhead.

"What a sad place the world is, after all," thought Billy. "Why are we here?"

Elfrieda came out, her eyes smiling. "They are purple," he thought, "but not for me."

They went in to dinner — fried chicken, and great slices of cold ham, and hot biscuits, and corn pone, and a big dish of fried potatoes, and buttermilk.

"What would Ruhlmann think if she could see me now," laughed Frieda, her mouth full of chicken.

" Did you ever see it cooked like this before, Billy, in batter? I never tasted anything like it in my life."

Billy pretended he was enjoying himself. He tasted nothing that he ate.

" And the biscuits, Billy! Look, see how they come open, like a watch."

The woman was smiling in the doorway, a good cook with an appreciative audience. She would have given Frieda the farm if she had asked for it, and when Billy tried to pay her for her trouble later, when they were ready to go, she was indignant, and would accept nothing.

She had the buggy brought around for them. Her husband had come in from the fields, and thought that they might obtain some gasolene at Fort Washington, down toward the river a piece. They were to leave the buggy in the village when they returned to their automobile, and somebody would see that it got home, all right. Everybody knew the buggy, and the horse, they might leave them anywhere.

They drove away, waving their thanks for the generous hospitality. Elfrieda was chirping with joy.

The road led through a pine woods, where the branches overhead were thick, shutting out the sun.

The wheels crunched musically in the heavy sand, the horse's hoofs made scarcely a sound. Along the fence, on either side, a tangled thicket of grape vines were putting on their new dresses, and a bird sat on a limb, preening its feathers.

"He will think of the time he kissed me first, and he will kiss me now," she thought, looking at him covertly.

Billy's memory had gone back to the arbor, in the yard at home, and he could see her, as she looked that day, when they had swung together in the hammock, and he had held her in his arms. She saw by his eyes what he was thinking. "Surely," she thought, "he will kiss me now." But Billy did n't.

At the fort they had no trouble in obtaining all the gasolene they required. They met there one of the young army officers who had been at Mrs. Winters' party a few evenings before, and he was delighted to see them, and pressed them to stay to dinner with him. His striker attended to the gasolene, and put a large can in the back of the buggy. Billy thought they would better go, as the sky was becoming overcast, and the air was beginning to feel like rain.

There was great activity at the post, and as they started back to the buggy they stopped, and watched some troops which had just landed at the wharf, and which were mobilizing there. Bronzed and hardened by the sun of the desert, for they were fresh from the Mexican border, they won even Billy's critical approval. The sun was glinting on their guns. Their band was playing. Billy glanced at Elfrieda, and saw that her eyes were shining.

"Do you remember that tune?" he asked.

"A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," she laughed. "How it brings back to me the memory of the Spanish war time."

"You remember how we went down to see the regiment from our town go?"

"I was thinking about that very thing," said Elfrieda.

"And how enthusiastic we were?"

"Oh, but were n't we, just!"

The flag was passing, and Billy came to attention, and saluted.

"Frieda," he asked, turning to her suddenly, "in a war between the United States and Germany, who, do you think, would win?"

"Oh, we would, of course," she answered quickly, her sparkling eyes full of admiration for the fine looking boys who were swinging by.

"What do you mean by 'we'?"

"The United States," said Frieda.

Billy threw back his head, and laughed, but Frieda was not laughing, and he saw that the light had faded from her eyes.

"Only the other day you told me that you must, you simply must be a German, and now —"

She looked at him dumbly, and as he took her arm he could feel her body shaking.

"I — I spoke —"

"Instinctively," he finished. "Frieda, I told you that you were an American. Now I know it."

"Die Eingeborene!" she said helplessly.

"That is it, you are a native born," said Billy, as serious now as she was.

They walked back to the buggy in silence. He put her in the seat, tucked the laprobe around her feet, and they drove over the road by which they had come, to the little town where they had left the car, and scarcely spoke, for each was busy with thoughts of many things.

They were well on their way to Washington when Elfrieda regained her outward composure. Inwardly she was more agitated than she had been before.

What would Billy think if he knew the errand upon which she had crossed the Atlantic!

She offered up a silent prayer that he might never know.

She looked at Billy as they reached the turn of the road where he had put his arm around her that morning; but he kept his eyes straight ahead, and both hands on the steering wheel, and did not look at her, or speak to her.

" I am stupid," she thought, " I have spoiled his day and mine."

The clouds, which had been following the river, now dissolved into mist, and then the rain came down. Almost in an instant they were drenched.

He drew the robe over her, and tucked it in at her back, and she pressed closer to him.

" As soon as we get into town I will telephone for a taxi," he said. " Lawson should have had a top on his car."

" I don't mind the rain."

" But your throat? "

" I never take cold."

" Oh, I — "

" It 's a warm rain," Frieda hastened to add, " I don't mind it really, in the least."

Night was coming on, and they drove through the deserted streets, indifferent to the deluge. At the apartment he hurried her into the elevator, and went up with her.

" Will you come in? " she asked, at the door.

" Now, like this? "

" Yes, I want to talk with you about — something —that is — that is on my mind."

" I will go in."

" You said I was an American," she said hesitatingly, her hand on the knob.

" Your answer, at the fort, proved that I was right. It is the call of country."

" Then why are you not a Prussian? "

" Der Eingeborener! " said Billy. " Don't put such ideas in my mind, Elfrieda." And then the words he had heard at the club, rushed back upon his memory: " It means something to be born in a country — I don't believe you ever get over it," some one had said, and had been speaking of him.

" Good God! " said Billy to himself, " Elfrieda could n't stand the gaff when the question was put right up to her. I wonder if I could? "

He opened the door, and followed Elfrieda into Mrs. Winters' drawing room. As they entered a big, blonde, bearded man arose from the chair by the window, and crossed the room with a quick stride.

Billy looked at him, and threw out his arms.

" Karl! " he said.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BLACK LEATHER CASE

"I hope you rested well," said Billy the next morning, going into his bedroom, where his brother had slept.

"Splendidly, thanks," said Karl. "And you? I feel like a dog for letting you go in on the couch."

"I was quite comfortable."

"It was good of you to bring me down here with you."

"It was the only thing to do, of course," answered Billy. "You could n't stay in Mrs. Winters' apartment, especially since Elfrieda is there alone now. Mrs. Winters has gone away for a few days. She 's a good sort; you must meet her."

"Thanks, I think I 'd a little rather not," said Karl, hiding a smile as he thought of Mrs. Winters, and wondered how she was getting along.

"I 'm sure you 'd like her," said Billy enthusiastically, "Corrie 's charming, just the kind you fancy, I should think."

" A — a particular friend of yours ? " asked Karl, looking at his brother keenly.

" I 've known her for years, and — "

" Nothing more ? "

" Certainly not."

" Oh. You used to be awfully fond of Frieda. Are you — "

" Please don't," said Billy, quickly. " You 'll find your bath in there, and my shaving things. But you don't need those, do you, Karl? I never saw such a beard. How long have you been afflicted ? "

" Nearly eight years," said Karl, soberly; " I don't know how I 'd look without it now."

" Very much as I do, I imagine," Billy replied. " You are like me in every other way, just as you always were."

" You are like me," amended Karl.

" It is the same thing, is n't it? You always insisted on that point. Well, have your way. But you are like me, just the same, height, shoulders, arms. Only the face is different. If I had n't been your twin I probably would n't have recognized you."

" I hope your clothes will fit me," laughed Karl. " These automobile togs are the only things I brought with me, and they are a sight."

"Help yourself to anything you want, in that closet," answered Billy, "and when you have had your tub, and dressed, breakfast will be served."

"In here?"

"I have ordered it from the café."

"Elfrieda told me you would probably do so. I invited her to have breakfast with us."

"I don't know —"

"Why not?"

"I 'm afraid it 's hardly —"

"Is n't she our cousin?"

"Other people do not know that — she is Miss Fralli here for some strange reason, I am sorry to say. I don't like the idea of her going under a false name."

"Bother! It 's her stage name," said Karl, lightly.

"She has never used it on the stage. However, if she is coming it can't be helped. Hurry, I think I hear her at the door now."

It was Frieda, and she came in smiling, but with none of the purple in her eyes that he loved.

"I shall never see it again," he thought, as he shook hands. She sat down, and the breakfast was brought in.

"Chops, potatoes, bacon, eggs on toast, and coffee," Billy called through the bedroom door.

"You have remembered my favorite breakfast," answered Karl.

"And a grapefruit."

"If there is only one grapefruit I shall have it," said Frieda, firmly; "I am off the diet now, and propose to go the limit."

Karl came in. He was wearing one of Billy's suits, of gray, that had just come from the tailor's. "How do you like the fit?" he asked, turning around.

"How like Billy you are," said Frieda. "I have seen you in nothing but your uniform for so long that I hardly know you."

Billy's face darkened, and into his eyes came a troubled look. He crossed to the window and stood staring out, then turned, and came back to the table, and took his seat at the head.

"What 's wrong?" asked Karl.

"I did not trouble you with it last night," said Billy, "for it was a strange and joyous re-union, after I had been thinking all this time that you were dead, but, Karl, I don't like the idea of your being in Washington at such a time as this."

"Why not?" demanded Karl.

"You are a Captain in the German navy."

"Germany and the United States are not at war."

"They will be, perhaps tomorrow, at any moment. They are practically at war now, and have been for months. It is — indiscreet is hardly the word."

"I am among friends and relatives," said Karl unconcernedly, helping himself to the potatoes, "and with the exception of one person — well, two — who are reliable and faithful in every way, not a soul in America knows who I am, or that I am here, or why I am here, but you and Frieda."

"I do not know why you are here," replied Billy, "I know only that you are here — and in disguise. You know what the consequences would be in times like these if that disguise were penetrated."

"How can it be?" answered Karl, shrugging his shoulders. "I have not been in America since I was a boy. Nobody knows me now."

"Several officers in the navy know that I have a twin brother," said Billy, anxiously; "they might suspect something."

"Had a twin brother, perhaps," admitted Karl. "Officially I am dead. That was provided for long ago."

"You mean the report of your death was deliberately faked?"

"Of course. My visit was foreseen, everything is foreseen in Germany. It was realized, of course, that my relationship with you was known to various people in the United States. My death was decided on, and so they killed me off in the Jutland battle, and the necessary steps were taken to have it published in the American papers. I wrote the despatch, that went by wireless, myself," and he laughed merrily. "It was a good joke."

"It was no joke to me," said Billy, getting up and pacing the floor. "I suffered. My twin brother dead! It nearly broke my heart."

"I understand, brother," said Karl, tears in his eyes. "Forgive me."

"A twin always cares, more than other people," said Billy, slowly. "I grieved for you, Karl."

"Where were you when you heard of it?"

"Manila," answered Billy.

"Good old Elsa," laughed Karl.

"You knew she sent me a cable? But —" He wheeled suddenly, and stood looking down at Frieda, whose breakfast was untasted on her plate. She turned her head away. "Frieda!" said Billy, "I did n't think you 'd have a hand in anything like that, I did n't think you 'd put a burden on me that nearly killed me, changed the whole current of my affections, filled me with hate for all my former English friends. I could n't forget that they had killed my brother."

"I could n't help it, I had to," said Frieda brokenly; "they made me, Billy. It was n't I, it was some one — "

"Upon my word, Wilhelm," said Karl, getting up, and taking his brother's hand, "I did n't realize how hard you would take it. I understand, now, and I 'm glad, glad it happened, if it has made me comprehend, made me know how true and firm you are. All our reports about you are confirmed, *Gott sei dank!*"

"Reports about me?" said Billy.

"I did not doubt you. I would have known without them," said Karl, his eyes shining with a look that was almost exhaltation. "You are my brother, you could not be anything else than what you are, like me, just like me. I 'll tell you," he added quickly, sitting down and drawing his chair up confidentially. "Frieda! Is the door locked? There is no one here? Be sure, please, and close that window. That," he went on eagerly, turning to Billy, "brings me to the question of why I am here. As soon as the cable reached us stating that you were leaving Hong Kong, I started for Washington to meet you. Now you know everything."

"Know?" said Billy, wonderingly. "Why, I don't know anything."

"I had to come," Karl went on rapidly, the words pouring from his lips. "The thing was pre-ordained by Fate. The Admiralty saw it, and so did I. You had been in the American navy for years, you had been through the Newport college, you had worked out problems in strategy, you had made a reputation, you would have the whole inside of the American navy in your grasp, access to everything we might want. The time came, and I am here. I will go over with you the points we wish cleared up, I will get from you the information you have, that we need. We had not contemplated war with the United States. We thought you would stand for anything. You have taken us by surprise. We have been obtaining much information, of course, for we realized that war was a possibility, although not likely. Now the blow is about to fall. It is essential that we have the new plan of naval operations that has been agreed upon, the location of bases and mines, the size and gun strength of the fleet. Will that fleet remain on this side of the Atlantic to protect the coast against our submarines, or will it combine with the British fleet in the North Sea? Have you perfected the submarine destroyer that Pendleton has been working on? We have something about it, but not much. An undersea destroyer that can see and hear under water might be our ruin. These are some of the things we must know. You will go over it all with me, and place in my possession such information in addition as you may be able to obtain. I am ready to return as soon as I have what I have come for."

"You have your get-away all planned?" asked Billy, who had not taken his eyes from his brother's face.

"Yes; I shall go back as I came."

"And how was that?"

"I crossed by submarine," said Karl.

"And made your landing —?"

"In Massachusetts Bay, five miles off the estate of Mrs. Sabiston, who lives at some place, I 've forgotten the name. You remember Margaretha Schoenleber? Her people returned to Germany about the time that we did."

"She lived next door to us," laughed Billy, "a little pudgy, yellow-haired girl."

"You would not know her now," said Karl, "she is — beautiful. She came back to America when she married." He walked to the window, and stood there, with his back to them.

"I thought, Karl —" Billy began.

"I know, I thought so once myself," said Karl, coming back. "Well, it was n't to be. I had my way to make in the navy, and nothing but work, no time for anything else." Billy looked at him with eyes full of understanding and sympathy.

"You remember the tin-type, Karl?" he asked, a smile coming to his lips.

"I have it yet," said Karl. "She sent it back to me when she broke the engagement."

"I did not know —"

"A boy and girl affair, but it was serious enough with me. . . . I do not blame her. . . . Ever since the war began she has been doing magnificent work for us."

"What does her husband think of that? Sabiston is not a German name."

"She is a widow," answered Karl, turning away to the window again.

"Oh! . . . I see."

"I had much correspondence with her, about — business. You recall the efficiency with which the interned ships were put out of commission? That order was sent through her."

"She must have been very helpful," said Billy, while Elfrieda watched his eyes.

"I could not tell you the things she has done. She picked me up in a motorboat when I landed, and brought me to Washington with her. She is ready at any moment to return when I give the word."

"The submarine is waiting for you?" suggested Billy.

"At our base at —"

"Stop, Karl!" cried Elfrieda, springing to her feet and trembling with excitement. "Can't you see his eyes? Don't you understand that he is draining you of everything you know?"

"Eh! What?" cried Karl.

"Are you sure he is not leading you on to tell him your secrets?" cried Elfrieda. "Have you been watching his face?"

Billy looked at her, with one of those smiles of his that she could never quite understand.

"What have you to say, Wilhelm?" demanded Karl, placing himself in front of his brother.

Billy shrugged his shoulders. "What are you accusing me of, Karl?" he laughed.

"I thought he would not do it," said Elfrieda; "I was almost sure he would not."

"You knew this," cried Karl in a terrible voice, his body shaking, his hands moving convulsively. "Why did you not warn me last night?"

"Because," she replied brokenly, "yesterday I was not quite certain. There was a doubt in my mind. He told me that I was an American, and then he trapped me by asking which would win in a war, the United States, or Germany, and I told him that we would, and then he saw he had betrayed my heart. I was born here, in America.

It makes a difference, Karl, oh, my God, it does, it does."

"You should have warned me!"

"How could I? If I am an American at heart because I was born in this country, if I am an American in spite of myself, although I try to be a German, if I long to be a German, if I pray to be a German, why is he not a German because he was born in Germany? I asked myself. I could not be sure. I was tormented, I felt as if my heart were being torn to pieces. I watched his face last night, and saw that the same doubt, the same fear, the same frightful agony was in his mind. I saw he was not sure of himself, that he wondered. Then how could I be sure? I waited."

"You should have put me on my guard," said Karl, and stood over her with anger darting from his eyes.

"How could I be sure?" she almost screamed. "I am not sure of myself!"

"I am sure of myself," said Billy.

"I knew it!" cried Karl, exultantly. "I knew it! You are loyal?"

"Of course," said Billy.

"My heart told me so," Karl laughed. "Women do not understand. She quite upset me for a moment."

"Frieda was right," said Billy. "She has understood me all her life. She saw last night that there was fear in my heart, fear that on the showdown I could n't stand the gaff. Well, I 've found I can."

"Then you will help me? There is no time to lose. I realize how dangerous my position is, and the more quickly I can obtain what I have come for and get away the better."

"You are mad, Karl; stupid."

"What 's that?"

Billy smiled to the roots of his hair.

"You said that last night you doubted yourself," said Karl, suspiciously.

"Only as to my heart," said Billy, the smile fading from his face. "There is a difference, Karl, between the heart and the brain. I have denied my heart all that I have ever wanted, all my life, and the denial has given me strength to go on, to the end."

Karl glanced at Elfrieda, then back again to his brother, and a flash of understanding passed between the two men.

"I must know if you will help me," said Karl, "I must know now."

Billy threw out his arms with a gesture of helplessness.

"You have the fate of the Fatherland in your hands," cried Karl, intensely. "Would you kill the land that gave you birth, your native land?"

"Don't, Karl, it is hard enough as it is."

"The life of Germany may depend on what you do today. I have trusted you, brother. I have planned for this, dreamed of it. Your Emperor is waiting for you."

"Is there a bigger dunce in Germany than you?" asked Billy, in mock incredulity.

"You can speak that way of your Kaiser?" demanded Karl, his face very red under his beard and his eyes lowering.

"I have no Kaiser, man. Are all of you in Germany insane like this?"

"You owe to him all that you have, all that you are today."

"What nonsense is this?"

"Who put you where you are?"

"Put me — where?"

"In the navy."

"I do not understand."

"Who sent you to Annapolis?"

"Why," said Billy, "Marshfield did; he was a Congressman then."

"Don't you know that Marshfield was ordered to appoint you?" Karl laughed derisively. "The boss from whom he was taking orders then, as now, was Adolph Bruch. Don't you know that Bruch was instructed to select a bright and promising German boy for Annapolis? Don't you know that Bruch chose you, and passed the word to Marshfield, and that Marshfield took his orders and appointed you? Don't you know that Bruch got his orders from Berlin? Who gives the orders in Berlin? You are the Kaiser's man."

Billy's tongue clove to his mouth. He could not speak. There flashed into his memory a picture of that day in school, the greatest day in his life. There was the platform, with Mr. Black, and the Congressman, great man that he was. And there was Adolph Bruch! He tried to speak again, and could not, for he knew in his heart that it was true.

"Of course it is true," said Karl, who had read his brother's thoughts. "And when I went back to Germany they sent me to Kiel, although I wanted to be an engineer. I did not care for the navy, but in Germany they think of everything. They have watched you all these years, they have advanced you step by step. You have been designated Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, the highest post you can hold with your rank. Do you want me to tell you where the order for that came from?"

Billy swayed forward, as he thought of Senator Marshfield. " Who told you this? " he asked, choking on the words.

" I found out all about it later," said Karl, " when I went to headquarters. You were sent to the Naval Academy with this very day in view, and now the day is here. We need you — I come to you."

" You are fools," said Billy, so passionately that his words were white with heat, " fools, all of you, from the Kaiser down. You might send a yellow dog to Annapolis, and he would come out a gentleman."

" You are a Prussian," cried Karl, " a German. Your country is dying, and you are asked to save her. The lives of thousands of your fellow Germans depend on you. The Empire's condition is desperate. If the United States goes in against her she may die, die, I tell you, not merely be defeated, but be obliterated. She may be wiped off the earth. We must have the secret plans of the American navy. When we learn where it is, how it is protected, we shall know where and how to strike, and we can destroy it. And with the American fleet disposed of we can starve England and win the war. Do you want Germany to win? I am your brother, Wilhelm, your twin, do it for me."

"You are quite mad, Karl," said Billy. "Don't talk like this to me again, I beg you."

"You shall have everything in the world you want," said Karl. "You shall be rewarded in every way. The people of Germany will worship you to the end of time."

"Where is the monument in England to Benedict Arnold?" asked Billy.

He looked at Frieda, who was on her knees, weeping, her head buried in the cushion of a chair, and Karl's eyes rested on her for a moment, too, and then flashed back to meet his brother's.

"You shall have everything you want — *everything,*" said Karl, his voice dying to a whisper. "If you do not think it safe to remain here after you have given to me what I want we will go away together, you, and I — and Frieda. The submarine is within call. We will leave Washington at night, and no person will see us go. In four days we shall be safely at sea, you, and I — and Frieda. And you shall marry her, Wilhelm, in Germany. You shall have her, have her, do you understand, man, to do with — *as you please!*"

As Billy's fist shot out he slipped on the rug, tripped, and fell, and the next instant Karl was upon him, and gave him a blow on the butt of the ear that laid him senseless on the floor.

Frieda crawled across the floor to him, and took his head into her lap.

"Billy! Billy!" she wailed. "Karl! You 've killed him."

"Nonsense," said Karl, putting his automatic back into his pocket, "he will come around all right. It would take more than that to kill a brother of mine. Take hold of his feet there to steady him, and help me drag him into this room."

"What are you going to do, Karl?" she cried, her eyes wide with fear.

"I 'm not going to hurt him," he answered. "Jove! I 've never seen you look like that before, Frieda — what 's the matter with you?"

"You shan't do anything to him, you shan't, do you hear?"

"No hysterics, please, I won't have it. Lend a hand there and help me haul him in." He kicked open the bedroom door. "Steady there, now. I 've got to get him tied up before he comes around and gives me a fight."

"Tied up!"

He took her roughly by the shoulder. "I want no woman's word in this, Frieda," he said. "Do you understand? Don't forget it. I 've got to tie him up and gag him."

"Karl! I won't have it. Look! He 's bleeding."

" I cut his ear a bit. It is nothing. Help me get him on the bed. There. Now for a gag, he 'll be yelling murder in a minute."

Karl gagged him. He pulled down the curtain cords and the heavy silk ropes that held the portières back, and lashed his brother's hands and feet to the brass bed, tying him with the deft and tenacious knots that sailors make. He took the straps off the trunk and bound him to the bed, across the thighs and chest.

Billy came around, and his eyes glared. Karl looked down at him and laughed.

" Sorry to do this, brother," he grinned, " but you know how things are. I can't be having you loose now, you know too much."

He went out, taking Elfrieda with him, and closed the door.

" Have you searched the place? " he asked.

" No."

" Those were your instructions."

" I was told to use my best judgment. I decided to wait for you. Besides, I could not do it, Karl. He never suspected me, never dreamed why I was here."

" You will help me now, search everything. We have no time to lose. You take the things in this room."

"These are not his things. This is the apartment of a friend. Billy has nothing here but his clothes, and the trunk and the bag in the other room."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"I will search the trunk. You search the bag."

"I will have nothing to do with it."

"You will do as I say."

"I won't, I won't!"

Karl went into the bedroom, opened the trunk, and began throwing the contents about, while Billy lay upon the bed, struggling.

"Nothing but clothes," said Karl.

"Billy!" cried Frieda, "I cannot help myself. I did not know he would attack you, or I would have warned you."

"I did not attack him," said Karl. "He attacked me when I asked his aid for the Fatherland."

"He struck you because you insulted me," replied Frieda, passionately, "because you offered me to him, as though I were for sale — as though I were a — a Belgian girl!"

"Is that so? I did not understand. I thought—"

"You do not understand because you are not like him. You offered me to him as if I had been one of the — the wretched women captured for the — the soldiers. It 's true, it 's true, I know it 's true."

"*Halt!*" cried Karl. "You will arouse everyone. You do not know what you are talking about. Be silent and do not interfere with me, whatever I do."

"You are a fool," said Frieda. "You have gagged him without learning anything."

"He said —"

"He was born a German, I tell you, just as I was born an American. It makes no difference what he said — you — you don't know how it is, Karl, to be torn like this, as I am, as I am sure he is. You feel one way one moment, and — and something quite different the next. You don't know what you feel, what you think. I know from my own raw heart what it is. He might have told you, he might have helped you in the end."

"Yes, yes," said Karl, "he might, I always thought he would, I knew he would. He is my brother, my twin brother. I will untie him — no, no, he would never forgive me now, he has hardened against me. He would be revenged. I dare not trust him now. I must find what I can alone."

"Unfasten him, Karl," Frieda begged. "He may not help you, but he will not betray you."

"I dare not run the risk."

Karl seized her by the arm and led her from the room, forcing her face to the light and looking at her with a terrible expression in his eyes.

"See here!" he said, "you play no tricks on me. What was it he told you about being born in America? I will have no weakness. You are a German, and you are under my orders. You have been here with him for some time and must know where he keeps his papers. Have you asked no questions?"

"Let me go, Karl."

"By God, I will not. You came here to help me. I need your help. Do you know where he keeps any of his papers? Answer me."

"I won't; let go my hand."

"Did you obey instructions?"

"I tried to."

"Then where are his papers?"

"I will not tell you."

"You will not? You know then. I demand an answer."

"I would die first. I will not betray him."

"Would you rather betray Germany? Did you not come here to serve Germany in all things? Did you not?"

"Yes; I did. That is true."

"What has changed you?"

"Nothing."

"That is not so. You are not the same. Do you not still love Germany?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then tell me what you know, Frieda. Time is flying past. Do you want to see me shot by a firing squad?"

"Oh, Karl."

"I am in great danger."

"What shall I do?" cried Frieda, wringing her hands, "what shall I do?"

"You must help me. By Jove! I forgot to search him."

He opened the door, and went into the bedroom. He felt in Billy's pockets, and there was nothing there, but his watch fell out, and rolled from the bed to the floor, and the back case flew open. A photograph and a bit of paper fluttered out, and Karl stooped and picked them up. He studied the three rows of figures written upon the card, and then stepped back quickly into the living room.

"Here is a photograph of you, Frieda," he said.

"An old one," she nodded.

"You remember it?"

"I saw it yesterday."

"Then you must have seen this also," and he held the card out to her. "It is the combination of a safe."

She looked at it, and turned her head away.

"Look at me! Do you wish to see me die like a dog? Then answer, what is this? Do you wish to break your mother's heart, see Germany laid waste, and English troops in Berlin? Then answer."

"Yes," she said so faintly he could hardly hear her, "it is the combination of a safe."

"What safe?"

"At his office in the Navy Department."

"How do you know that?"

"I was with him when the combination was given to him."

"Was there anything in the safe?"

"He put some papers in."

"What kind of papers?"

"I did not see them, they were in a black leather case."

"Oh," said Karl, and took a deep breath.

"Were they plans, orders — what were they?"

"He did not say."

"He has been working on operations?"

"He has been in consultation with the board of strategy."

"God!" said Karl, and took another deep breath.

"You would know his office again?"

"Yes."

"You know how to get there?"

"He showed me," said Elfrieda, "the day I was there — yesterday! Turn to the left, go up a flight of stairs, second door to the right."

"You must go to the Department, and get into that safe."

"It is impossible. There are guards, and no visitors are admitted without passes. There is no way to get in."

"There is always a way for everything," said Karl, and pulled his twany beard. "Wait!" he cried. "I have it."

He locked the bedroom door behind him, and rushed like a madman into the bathroom, tore off his coat and collar, and turned on the hot water. He found Billy's razors, the soap, and the strop, hanging on a hook behind the door. Twenty minutes later he walked back into the room, and Frieda, who had thrown herself exhausted upon the couch, started up with a cry:

"Billy!"

Karl laughed. "Am I as like him as that?" he asked.

She stared at him in amazement, and Karl grinned, and rubbed his face with his hands.

"I have n't been like this for years," he said.

"I hardly know myself with a smooth face. Now, call up the Willard, and ask for Mrs. Sabiston."

He walked up and down the floor, smoking and scowling. Presently he took the receiver from Elfrieda.

"Mrs. Sabiston? You recognize my voice? Quite well, thank you. Can you be ready to start back in, say, half an hour? Thank you. No, not very successful, but things may turn out all right in the end. I will tell you when I see you. This is most important. Can you be at the north entrance in half an hour? We are going back at once. What 's that? Yes, I fear so, but we cannot wait for night, there is not time."

He hung up the receiver, and turned to go.

Frieda looked at him inquiringly.

"I am going to walk into Wilhelm's office," whispered Karl, "and take those papers out of his safe, and you are going with me to show the way."

"Karl! I could n't do that."

"You must, and shall."

"You will be discovered, arrested, you may even be — "

"I fooled you," laughed Karl, lightly.

"I see the difference now," said Frieda. "Your faces are not the same. There is something spiritual — "

"Are you ready?"

"I must say good bye to him."

"Keep out of that room," said Karl, and pushed her from the door. "I shall take no chances with you."

"I must say good bye to him — alone."

"Come with me," he answered.

"Good bye, Billy," she called through the door, "Karl is — "

Karl put his hand over her mouth. "No more," he said, "not another word. You will spoil everything in a minute."

"I must get my things upstairs."

"There is no time. You have your coat and hat. I am waiting."

"What are we going to do, Karl?"

"I shall obtain that leather case, and then we shall return to Germany, in the submarine."

"Are you going to leave Billy tied up like that?"

"It won't hurt him."

"He may starve — he lives here all alone."

"He will work loose in two days; by that time I shall have escaped."

"In two days he will die of hunger."

"He will be no hungrier than the people of Germany. Who looks after his rooms?"

"The janitor's wife."

"I will call her on the 'phone and say I am going out, and tell her not to bother with my apartment today or tomorrow."

He called the janitor, and gave his orders. Then he walked to the bedroom, and paused with his hand upon the knob.

"I will not go in," he said to Elfrieda. "Good bye, brother," he called through the door. "There will be sorrow in Berlin when I return. They trusted you so — everybody."

"And now, Frieda," he said, turning to her suddenly, and putting his face so close to hers that she shrank back with a cry, and tried to escape the hand he closed over hers, "feel this in my pocket. A pistol! So help me God, Frieda, if you attempt any tricks I will kill you. Germany has put her trust in you for this hour, and you shall not fail. Swear that you will not betray your country."

"I promise, Karl," said Frieda, faintly.

"Do you swear?"

"Yes."

"And you will not attempt to communicate with Wilhelm?"

"If you demand it of me, Karl, I will not."

"Come, then."

They walked to the Navy building, and she took him to the western archway. Inside she turned to the right into the first corridor, and then she stopped:

"Turn to the left," she repeated, "go up a flight of stairs, and it is the second door to the right."

"Who will be in the room?" asked Karl.

"An officer named Wallis shares the room with Billy."

"How does he address him?"

"Everyone calls him 'Wallie.'"

They walked in, and there was little Wallis, busy at his desk.

"Hello, Billy," he called, and got up, and shook hands.

"Hello, Wallie," laughed Karl, and saw with satisfaction that the other man's eyes were all for Elfrieda. "I dropped in to get some papers I left here yesterday."

He took the combination from his pocket, studied it a moment, opened the safe, secured the leather case, closed the safe, buttoned his coat over the package, and took Elfrieda's arm.

Little Wallis followed them to the door, and looked longingly after them, and then returned to his desk with a sigh.

On the sidewalk Karl lighted a cigarette, nodded to a watchman, who was going in, and asked Elfrieda to show him the way to the Willard.

Mrs. Sabiston was waiting for them in the car at the north entrance, with Bruno asleep on the seat beside her. They stepped quickly in, and Karl took the wheel, and drove through F street, east.

"We will leave the car at the railroad station," said Karl.

"We are not going back the way we came?" asked Mrs. Sabiston.

"It would take too long, we have not four days at our disposal. We must go by train. You can leave the car with the taxicab people at the depot and have them take it to their garage, to be called for later. You go do this while I buy the tickets."

Mrs. Sabiston and Elfrieda joined him at the ticket window a few minutes later, and he showed them the tickets.

"You have bought them by the B. & O.," said Mrs. Sabiston; "I always use the Pennsylvania."

"The other train goes first. We must get out of Washington as quickly as possible. Take this, Mrs. Sabiston, and guard it closely. If anything happens to me see that it is put aboard the submarine. And now I must ask you to send a telegram."

Mrs. Sabiston nodded, and took the small black leather case he passed to her through her muff. "What shall I send?" she asked.

"In code. Tell the wireless man to have the submarine come back to pick me up as soon after midnight tonight as possible. You have your code book with you?"

"Yes. Where shall I go to write the message?"

"In that telephone booth. We will wait here."

When Mrs. Sabiston returned, and filed the message, they walked through the concourse, and took the train. Mrs. Sabiston boldly carried Bruno into the parlor-car. She expected the usual argument with the conductor, but had much faith in the persuasive eloquence of a small gratuity.

CHAPTER XX

MR. MONSON GETS AN EYEFUL

"While I am in Boston," said Mr. Monson, "I think I shall run down to Namaschet, and see how Peters is getting along."

The Chief nodded.

"In fact, I think I had better go there first, and attend to the Boston business later."

"Very well. You have had absolutely no report from Peters?"

"Nothing but the one letter, that he wrote from Scituate. It was rather personal."

"What did he say?"

"Merely that he had been employed by Mrs. Sabiston to run her motorboat, and that he was enjoying himself."

"He had learned nothing?"

"Nothing."

"That is not like Peters. Had he got into the house?"

"Not yet."

"He had searched nothing, questioned nobody?"

"Apparently he had not."

"Rather slow work, for Peters."

"There was something about dogs. Oh, yes, I remember. He said that Mrs. Sabiston was fond of them. Had a pointer that wore a gold collar, and some great Danes that roamed the grounds at night, so that he dared not approach the house."

"That is suspicious."

"I thought so."

"What was he doing with himself?"

"Running the motorboat."

"That was all?"

"Yes. She made him go out every day."

"Alone?"

"Sometimes she accompanied him."

"Just sail around anywhere?"

"Why no," said Monson, "come to think of it, Peters said she made him go straight out to sea five miles, never more and never less, always five miles."

"Then what?"

"Then back."

"That was all he was doing?"

"He mentioned nothing else."

"Has Mrs. Sabiston left Washington yet?"

"She is still at the hotel."

"Then you would better go over immediately and give Peters a lift. It should be easier to get what you want in her absence. And if it does n't look like a good prospect, send Peters back. We need every man."

Half an hour later a quiet, middle-aged gentleman in spectacles glanced up from the newspaper that he was reading in the Pullman of the New York train, then about to leave, and observed a belated party coming through the car.

"Remarkably handsome man," thought Mr. Monson, "and a very good-looking woman — two of them, as I live. Two of the best-looking ones I have seen in a long time. Both German — no, the brunette looks a little like an Italian — 'five feet seven inches, weight one hundred and thirty, hair dark, general appearance stylish, probably Italian' — where did I hear that description before? Sounds familiar. She is n't Italian, though, I can see that now. That 's the American look, you can't mistake it. You don't see a face like that often, not once out of a hundred thousand. Hello! pointer dog — gold collar! Why, these must be some of Peters' friends. I should n't be surprised if we had quite a little reunion at Namaschet."

Mr. Monson sauntered behind the party with the pointer dog through the Pennsylvania station, in New York, and his taxi followed theirs across town. He was behind them when they passed the Boston gate, sat opposite them at table in the dining car, listened to the argument over the pointer dog, and saw the bill passed and noted the conductor's smile, and other details.

But he did not follow the pretty brunette when she left the car at New London, for he saw that she was bare-headed, and would return, and besides, he was more interested in the other woman. So he did not read the messages that Elfrieda filed at the telgraph office, although one of them would have interested him.

It was addressed to Hannibal G. White, 45 Broadway, New York, and read: " W. H. unsatisfactory see Bruch immediately," and was signed " S." The other telegram was addressed to Mrs. Sabiston's chauffeur, and directed him to meet her train at Clifton Junction.

Nor did Mr. Monson see Elfrieda, when she had filed the two despatches that had been written on the train, glance swiftly around, seize a pen, and write a message of her own, a message that would have puzzled him, for it was worded:

JANITOR,
Summit Apartment, Washington, D. C.

Go to Mr. Lawson's rooms at once and find watch I have left on bedroom floor.

W. H.

Mr. Monson did not observe any of these things. Hence he was much surprised, when the train stopped, fifteen miles from Boston, a most unusual thing for those fast trains to do, to see the pointer dog with the gold collar escorted from the car by two very good-looking ladies and a tall, handsome man. He surmised, after glancing at the map in his time-table, that Mrs. Sabiston was making a short-cut to Namaschet by automobile, so that, upon reaching Boston, he lost no time in getting up to the offices of the Secret Service branch, and enlisting the services of six men.

He had decided to go down to Namaschet that night, by automobile, and felt that for an expedition of that kind too many assistants would be likely to prove less annoying than too few.

" And by the way," asked Mr. Monson, when they were ready to start, " stop at the first drugstore and get a bottle of strychnine, and if you see a grocery store or a butcher shop open, let me know, I want three or four big chunks of raw meat. Will you attend to that, Roberts? "

" Yes, sir — dogs? "

" Danes," answered Mr. Monson, and settled himself for a nap.

They shook him, when the big touring car had stopped in front of the entrance to " Rock Crest," and Mr. Monson got out, and stretched his legs in the roadway, and complained bitterly of the mud.

" Gate 's locked, sir," said Roberts.

Mr. Monson turned his flashlight on the lock, and then upon the driveway.

" Automobile tracks," he announced briefly, " fresh ones. The party has gone in. Man's footprints here in the mud, lot of 'em."

" The chauffeur got out to open the gate," suggested Roberts.

" Yes, that 's it. No — hello! Here 's a footprint over the tire track. Somebody else has been here, somebody came up and looked through the gate after the automobile had gone through. Rather gloomy place for a lone pedestrian, a cold, dark night like this. What 's down that way? "

" Stone wall, both sides," replied Roberts, who had been looking about. " There 's the stump of a tree twenty-five yards down, where we can get over."

" Lead me to it," said Mr. Monson, and scrambled through the wet bushes. " I 'll go over first. No, I 'll wait on the wall for you fellows, and we 'll all go over together. Peters has a graphic way of describing dogs. Hello! see here, more footprints. Our unknown also found this stump, and got over, judging by the vines pulled off this wall. Well, give me a leg. There! Thanks."

"Here 's the meat," said Roberts.

"Put the strychnine on it. Maybe the dogs will fall for it, but I don't know about these Danes, they 're uncommonly faithful and — hello! Gad! that gave me a turn. Look, there in the bushes, Roberts, what do you see?" He flashed his light downward again.

"That 's a dog, all right," said Roberts, "a regular elephant. Dead, too." He scrambled down the wall, and examined the dog under the light. "Shot through the head, Mr. Monson," he called softly, "a forty-four."

The other men joined him on the ground, and they began picking their way through the trees. Presently they came to the roadway for which they had been searching, and a hundred yards up the drive lay the body of another dog, shot, like the first, through the head.

"I don't know who did it, but he is my friend," said Mr. Monson. "And now for the third one."

"Three?" asked Roberts. "Well, I hope — here it is, sir."

The men came up, and they stood for a moment looking down at the Dane, a monster, the largest of them all.

"Gad! what teeth," laughed Monson. "No wonder Peters did n't make more progress."

They walked along quietly under the thick branches of the trees, threshing about in the wind.

" Stable — and garage," whispered Mr. Monson, presently. " Any lights? "

" All dark," replied Roberts.

" There 's the house," said Monson after a while. " We 've come in the back way."

The men passed through the woods, and stood now on the edge of the grounds, hesitating, keeping in the shadows. Before them was open sky above the sea, which they could hear roaring on the beach below.

" Peters sleeps in a boathouse, down that way somewhere," said Mr. Monson. " It 's at the foot of the cliff, he said. We must get there somehow, but we can't cross those open grounds. Now Roberts, you — hello, Roberts, did you see that? "

" What, sir? "

" Look, straight ahead and up, there. Get those two chimneys. Now watch the north one. See that! "

" Looked like a spark," said Roberts, softly.

" Looked? It was a spark," whispered Mr. Monson. " There it is again, running up and down like lightning — it 's a lightning rod, that 's what it is, Roberts, I can see it now. Most peculiar."

" What do you suppose — "

"Shucks! Roberts," interjected Mr. Monson, "there 's only one thing it could be. It 's a wireless. Wait a minute, now you can see."

The round moon, like a ship at sea, came riding out of the ocean of scurrying cloud. Monson threw himself upon the ground, and looking up brought her smiling prow in line with the south chimney. Across the silvery disk the spider-like wires traced their cobweb way.

"Wireless, all right," chuckled Monson, "you can see it now as plain as day. Dandy place for one, too, could n't be better. Chimneys were just made for it. But they forgot about the induction from that lightning rod. Bad insulation — and I saw the spark. Smart, but there 's always a slip somewhere. The slickest of them will do it. Now I would like to see Peters show up."

"Maybe it was Peters who killed those dogs," suggested Roberts. "Has he got a silencer on his gun?"

"I guess so, but what 's that got to do with it?"

"Well," said Roberts, "those dogs were shot since the party came in by auto."

"Yes," nodded Mr. Monson.

"That could n't have been more than an hour and a half ago. Whoever killed those dogs had a silencer, otherwise the people would have heard the shots, and the house would be aroused. You see, it 's black."

"It could n't have been Peters," said Mr. Monson, "unless he was out tonight. The man who made those footprints out there killed the dogs. They were shot by the gate, and somebody coming in did that. Besides, the house is n't as black as it looks. There 's a crack of light under the window over that portico."

"I see it now, sir."

"You 've got to look in that window, Roberts. Come along with me, and I 'll give you a boost up. The rest of you fellows stay here, ready if anything happens."

Mr. Monson and Roberts left the shadows of the woods, and cautiously crossed the back lawn to the house.

"Here 's a rose trellis, sir!" said Roberts.

"Strong enough to hold you? Then up with you."

Roberts climbed up like a cat, pulled himself over the cornice of the portico, and crawled across the roof, Mr. Monson waiting at the foot of the rose trellis until he returned.

"Well?" he asked in a whisper.

"Man sending wireless," said Roberts, "heavy man, brown mustache, German."

"Very good," replied Mr. Monson. "And now for a look at the front of the house."

He beckoned to the other men, and posting two at the rear, led Roberts and the rest through the shrubbery.

They crept along under the walls of the main building, turned the angle of the south wing, and passed around to the piazza.

"Plenty of light on this side," said Mr. Monson under his breath; "the folks have n't retired. You wait here, while I go get an eyeful."

He eased himself upon the piazza, crept across to the window, and looked in.

"Good God!" said Mr. Monson to himself, and put his shoulder against the window. A dog barked as he shouted, "Come on, boys!" and heaved himself into the room, a gun in each hand.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SPARK ON THE CHIMNEY

Neil Lawson opened his bedroom door, and was half way across the room before he suddenly stopped as if he had been petrified. Over his handsome, boyish face spread a look of mingled horror, astonishment and mirth.

Gradually he came to his senses, his eyes blinking, his mouth twitching. He tried to speak, and succeeded only in making incoherent sounds. Then he became galvanic, and began to pull frantically at the straps that bound Billy to the bed. He loosened the cords, and for the first time observing the gag, pulled it out.

"Where are they?" cried Billy.

"Who? What the deuce—"

"Have they gone?"

"I—I—" stammered Neil.

"Get me loose, here. Thanks, old man. Damned lucky you came in. He telephoned the janitor not to bother about the rooms for two days, and I had reconciled myself to the thought of a long fast, and—I 've got to find them."

He struggled to his feet, and began rubbing the soreness out of his arms and legs.

"Who the devil — "

"You laughed at me," interrupted Billy.

"I could n't help it," admitted Neil, "you did look so comical, stretched out there, tied up like a ham. What 's the matter, burglars? Have you been robbed? I never had such a shock in my life; walked right in — and there you were."

"I 've got to find them," said Billy, "I must find them, but where to look — Give me a cigarette. Thanks, Neil, lucky you came in, old man, providential. How do you happen to be back in Washington?"

"Well," said Neil, full of enthusiasm, his face glowing, but a little of shame in his eyes, "I 've got a commission in the army — captain. Of course I 'm not fit to be a captain, don't know a thing, but Senator Marshfield fixed it up for me, and wired me to come on, so I quit the aviation school, and here I am. Just got in. Don't know where I 'm going or what I 'm expected to do, but I 'll try to bluff it through. One could n't turn down a captaincy, although I — I would rather have got it through merit than pull. Still, it 's fortunate."

"Fortunate for me," said Billy.

" How long had you been tied up like that? "

" Nearly an hour."

" You would have worked loose."

" In about two days, yes. And then it might have been too late. Well, I 'm off. Sorry about the portières and things, Neil, I 'll — "

" Nonsense, I 'll have them fixed up all right. Whoever pulled them down was in a hurry, just ripped them away. Who did it, Billy? "

" I — I — I 'd a little rather — "

" Oh," said Neil, looking at him curiously. " You — you don't want to notify the police? "

" No," said Billy, quickly, " no, I — I really think I 'd better — just let the matter drop. Rather personal — sorry I can't tell you more, old man, but you — you know — "

" Don't tell me, of course," said Neil. " So far as my things are concerned it 's quite all right."

" You are considerate, Neil, I don't know how to thank you for your kindness, and your — your delicacy. Now, I must hurry. I really must not delay any longer."

" Where are you going? Can I help you? You may depend upon me for anything, Billy."

" Thanks. I — I don't know where I 'm going. Why — why, Neil, I don't know where to go. All I know is that she has gone — "

"Oh," said Neil, with a grin, "she 's gone, has she? By Jove! — she!"

"She did n't tie me up," explained Billy, his face scarlet. "I can't tell you, Neil. I would if I could, but there are reasons — I can't."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"I think not," said Billy. "I 'm trying to remember a name, the name of a woman — she has probably gone there. Oh, I say, Neil, did you ever hear of a Mrs. Sabiston? That 's the name I was trying to think of. They called her on the 'phone just before they left, and made arrangements to go away — by auto. I don't know where she was stopping."

"Sabiston," said Neil, wrinkling his forehead; "I 've read about her some place — where does she live?"

"That 's what I want to find out."

"Of course! I 'm very helpful. Let me think."

"She lives somewhere near Boston," said Billy, slowly. "It seems to me I 've heard that. Hold on, Neil, maybe Mrs. Winters would know."

He rushed to the 'phone, and called Mrs. Winters' apartment. Mrs. Winters had not yet returned, and the maid did not know anything about a Mrs. Sabiston. Miss Fralli had gone out to breakfast at seven, and had n't come back yet.

"It's no use, Neil," said Billy, dejectedly, "I'm absolutely up against it."

"Are you sure the lady lives near Boston?"

"I remember having heard that."

"Then she might be in the Boston Blue Book, probably would. Let's take a look."

"Where would we find one?"

"There would be one at the Willard," answered Neil, after thinking for a moment. "I'll go down there with you. Come, pull yourself together, you are agitated. We will walk, it will do you good."

They started out, but Billy insisted on taking a taxi, and they were at the hotel in a few minutes. At the desk they found a Blue Book, and Neil skimmed the pages rapidly.

"Here it is, Billy," he said presently, "'Sabiston, Mrs. Richard Brainerd, *née* Schoenleber —'"

"That's the one," laughed Billy, excitedly, "Margaretha Schoenleber."

"Why, I knew her, I have n't heard of her for years. I thought she went to Germany when she was a squab."

"She married an American, and came back, some years later."

"'Commonwealth avenue,'" said Neil, reading, "'Namaschet' — her summer home is there."

"That's the place," said Billy, "I'm sure."

"Mrs. Sabiston has left," interrupted a clerk who had been standing near.

"She was here?"

"She went away this morning, by automobile."

"How long ago?"

"Maybe half an hour. I saw her in the lobby with the dog. Handsomest dog I think I ever saw; wore a solid gold collar, with a diamond in the locket."

"Gold collar!" interrupted Neil. "Was it a liver and white English pointer?"

"That 's the one," nodded the clerk.

"Two women and a man?" asked Neil.

"Mrs. Sabiston was alone, she did n't even have a maid."

"I saw the dog in the Union Station, going through the New York gate, as I was coming in this morning," said Neil, turning to Billy. "Two women and a man. One of the women was a perfect stunner."

"Yes, that is so," smiled Billy, enthusiastically.

"Tall, slender —"

"Yes, yes."

"— blonde," finished Neil, rapturously, "a perfect corker, face like soft pink velvet, and big blue eyes, oh, she was —"

"That 's not the one," interrupted Billy, crestfallen.

" That was Mrs. Sabiston," grinned the clerk.

" That Margaretha Schoenleber ! " cried Neil. " Not in a thousand years. She was beginning to bulge when I was a kid. She must have a shape like a bushel of potatoes by this time."

" That was Mrs. Sabiston, all right," insisted the clerk, " and she has the best figure that I 've seen in Peacock Alley this winter, too. Well, she ought to have. Plenty of porterhouse steak went up to her dining room — for the dog. All she ate while she was here was hominy and spinach, and listen to what I 'm saying, if many more women go in for this new fad a whole lot of hotels are going to close up before long."

" What was the other woman like ? " asked Billy, anxiously.

" The other one," said Neil, " let me see now. Tan shoes and spats, and sand-colored silk stockings. Is that the one you 're looking for ? "

" Tall ? "

" Yes, rather. I did n't notice particularly, don't care much for brunettes."

" She was dark ? "

" I think so. But the other woman — well, if I had known that Margaretha Schoenleber was going to grow up to have sense enough to live on spinach, I 'd have gone to Germany myself."

"What kind of a man was with them?" asked Billy.

"Chap about your build."

"Oh."

"He had his hat pulled down over his eyes, so I did n't see him, but that blonde — "

"They were taking a train?"

"They were going through the New York gate."

"I 'm off to Namaschet," said Billy. "I have two days' leave."

"Is there anything I can do for you, old man?"

"Nothing, Neil, thanks, good bye."

Billy jumped into a taxi. Half an hour later he was on the Pennsylvania express, on the way to New York. He arrived in Boston in time to catch a late train to Namaschet, and rode to the gate of "Rock Crest" in the town jitney.

"Mrs. Sabiston came by here a short time ago," the chauffeur said as they rode along. Billy watched the man turn back, and then tried the heavy iron gate. It was locked.

He shook it, and looked through the bars. A heavy-breathing animal came up, and Billy could see its white teeth glistening in the darkness.

"Dane," he said, "and about the largest one I ever saw. Nice sort of people must live here."

He walked along by the high stone wall that bordered the road, stumbling through the bushes that were wet with the rain that had been falling. Twenty-five yards away he came upon the stump of a tree. He climbed up, scrambled to the top of the wall, and peering down in the gloom saw that the dog had followed him, silently, its head back, its fangs uncovered.

"Old man," said Billy, "you are as fine a dog as I ever saw, and under many circumstances you and I could be great friends, but just now you are interfering with my plans. I did n't come all the way up here to let anything stop me now."

He took his pistol from his pocket, examined it, leaned down, and fired.

The great Dane collapsed.

"The silencer," said Billy to himself, "has some drawbacks. I 'd be rather glad if somebody would come down now and show me the way up to the house."

He dropped over the wall, and walked slowly through the trees, found the roadway, and followed it over the hill. At a turn in the road the tawny body of a huge beast loomed before him in the dim light that showed beneath the archway of trees.

"Another one!" said Billy, and got his gun out just in time. A little further on he killed the third Dane, and after that he walked more warily.

"That was my last cartridge," he thought. "I wonder if they have any more dogs? Nice people, very nice people, so hospitable."

He emerged at last from the shadows of the woods, passing the dark and silent garage, and stood for a moment on the lawn, looking at the house framed against the wintry sky.

"This must be the back of it," he thought; "it probably faces the sea, that is how I should have built it. Fine old place, middle part pure Colonial, look at those old-fashioned chimneys — hello! what the deuce was that? Looked like a spark — there it is again — it is a spark. It 's a radio, could n't possibly be anything else. Portable radio. So, Mrs. Sabiston, you have been very helpful, have you? Well, I rather guess yes. Very clever, very, but somebody forgot about the lightning rod on the north chimney. Bad insulation, and I saw the spark. Things are beginning to look quite interesting. I 'd like to take a peep under the window shade in that room over the portico. Well, I may do it yet, the night 's young."

He walked around the corner of the south wing, following the driveway, stepped on the piazza, and lifted the heavy brass knocker. A dog barked.

"By Jove! another Dane. No, that 's a smaller dog." He waited, and knocked again. The door was opened, and Mrs. Sabiston, in evening dress. stood framed against the light, a pointer dog barking at her side, and behind her, Karl, in the suit of gray in which he had left Washington. They stared at him unable to say a word as he walked gravely into the hall.

"Put your gun up, Karl," said Billy, and took off his hat and coat.

"How the devil — " Karl's eyes were hard and cold, like two tempered steel drills. Billy's were soft, with the blue light in them.

"Don't look at me like that, Karl," he laughed. "I did n't come here to interfere with you. Get away if you can make it; perhaps, after all — " He paused, as he thought of the spark he had seen on the chimney, and then he added slowly: "I came for Frieda; where is she?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Mrs. Sabiston was very glad to meet Billy again. She remembered him, of course, and how she had made faces at him through the fence, in the old days, and she smiled at the recollection as she led the way into the drawing room.

"She is very good looking for a blonde," thought Billy, "but Neil has a primitive taste in beauty."

He crossed the room to the big fireplace, and then, looking about him, he asked again, "Where is Frieda?"

"She is here," replied Karl, ungraciously.

Frieda at that moment came in, very quietly, and Billy saw, as he took her hand, that her face was drawn and white. She wore her hat and coat, and carried a small satchel in her hand. On the divan, by the window, lay a heavy ulster, and by it a woman's motor wrap.

"They are going," thought Billy; "I have got here just in time."

"How like your brother you are!" said Margaretha, looking from Billy to Karl. "It is almost impossible to tell them apart, is it not, Elfrieda?"

"There is a great difference," replied Elfrieda, "in the eyes, and about the mouth."

"Yes, I notice it now," said Mrs. Sabiston, and thought: "Karl is the handsomer."

Elfrieda put her satchel on the table, and turned to the window, and stood looking out across the lawn to where the ocean lay dark and sullen under the clouds. Billy followed her with his eyes. Then he asked:

"You are leaving, Karl?"

Karl's eyelids narrowed, and he looked at his brother closely.

"Yes," he admitted, after a long pause, "yes, we are going away — tonight."

"Elfrieda is not going."

"You are mistaken; she is returning with me."

"I cannot have her in Germany now," said Billy. "There is too much suffering there — and things may soon be worse. She might be hungry, ill — she might even die, and the crossing would be dangerous, very dangerous, Karl, as you know."

"That is true," conceded Karl, "but notwithstanding, she is going with me, so there need be no argument about that."

"They are ready to go, that is certain," thought

Billy, " yet there is no car at the door and the garage was dark as I came by. Can it be possible that the submarine is coming in here? "

He walked to the window, where Mrs. Sabiston had joined Elfrieda, and looked over their heads at the vast expanse of heaving billows spread before them, and at the breakers foaming over the reefs.

" You are close to the sea, Margaretha; I had no idea. Rather a rocky coast, quite dangerous, I should think."

" Very," answered Mrs. Sabiston, shortly.

" Ugly looking reefs."

" Very."

" Where is the nearest harbor? "

" Harbor? Oh, north of us, not a great distance." Margaretha went back to the fire, and then began to pace the floor nervously, glancing from time to time at the watch on her wrist. At her side, back and forth across the room, walked Bruno, who could not bear to be away from her an instant. Billy turned to Elfrieda.

" Are you really going away from me, girl? "

" I must," she answered in a faint voice. " You don't understand, Billy, you do not know all the things that I know. I must go back! " Her hands were tightly clasped together, and he saw that her body was tense with suppressed emotion.

"No one can make you, dear," said Billy, quietly, "if you do not wish to go."

"You do not understand."

"No one shall force you to go against your will. Give me the right to speak for you, dear, and you shall stay here with me."

"I cannot, Billy."

"You must reach a great decision tonight, Frieda. You have come to the parting of the ways."

"I know," she answered in a low tone.

"You have thought — of all the things we have talked about?"

"Yes."

"And your mind is made up — about everything?"

"I do not know, I — I cannot see my way."

"It is very clear before you, it seems to me."

"That is because you do not understand."

"Oh, but I do, dear, I have been through it all myself."

"It is different with me. There is something, I cannot tell you what it is, something that I am beginning to see is terrible."

Billy looked back across the room. Margaretha and Karl were standing close together by the fireplace. He held her hand as he bent over her, and her face was as white as Elfrieda's.

"It is a trying time for many of us, dear, for others as well as for yourself," Billy whispered. "For me, also, Frieda."

"I know. You should not have come, Billy, but I was sure you would know how I needed you — and come to me." Her lip was trembling.

"I am here," he said simply.

"When we arrived, and I learned that all the plans were made, and that we were going to leave tonight, I feared you could not reach me in time."

"I started as soon as I was released."

"You do not blame me for any share in that?"

"Frieda! No, dear, you had nothing to do with it."

"You trust me so."

"Am I not here?"

"But how did you manage that? It has puzzled me. I could not put the address in the telegram, I could n't even send you word, Karl made me swear I would n't. What time did the janitor find you?"

"Janitor!"

"I told him to look in your bedroom for your watch, and I signed your name to the telegram, but I did n't have a chance to send it until we had reached New London. You must have come some shorter way."

"I have n't the faintest idea what you are talking about," laughed Billy. "Did you send a telegram to the janitor — to go to my room to look for my watch? By Jove! that was clever, Frieda."

"He found you?"

"Well, no," smiled Billy; and then, apologetically, as though he was sorry he had not waited for the janitor, "Neil Lawson came in unexpectedly, an hour after you had left. I learned that you had taken the train to New York, and concluded that you would come here. You and Karl must have gone directly from the apartment to the station."

"No," said Frieda, impulsively, "we went to the Navy Department first, and — "

"Navy Department!" exclaimed Billy, his voice rising unconsciously.

"What 's that!" cried Karl, his throat choked with anger. "Frieda, you have broken your promise, you have — "

"Not quite so loud, please, in speaking to Frieda," said Billy, turning upon his brother suddenly, and holding out his hand, warningly.

Karl looked at his watch.

"It is nearly time," he said in an undertone to Mrs. Sabiston. "Is the motorboat ready?"

"I brought it in to the flat rock myself," she answered, looking at him with admiration in her eyes. "Everything is attended to."

"You are quite sure you can come back alone?"

"Quite sure."

"Don't you think you would better take one of the men along with you? It is rough outside tonight."

"It was decided that we would not trust them, besides, they have been unable to venture out by day, and so could not learn the course, and the channel through the reefs. I must go alone with you and Frieda."

"Let us be off, then," said Karl, aloud, looking once more at his watch.

"Frieda is not going," interrupted Billy, "and I am not at all sure now that you are."

"You speak with considerable positiveness for a man who has absolutely nothing to say about it," replied Karl, with a note in his voice that Billy had never heard before in any voice addressed to him by any man.

"What were you doing at the Navy Department?"

"You shall pay dearly for giving me away," cried Karl, savagely, turning upon the girl with a snarl, "you have broken your word."

"You shall not threaten her," said Billy. "This business has gone far enough, farther, I see now, than I had ever dreamed. I must know everything."

"What shall I do!" moaned Frieda, "what shall I do!"

"Think what you have done," cried Karl.

"I could not help it, Karl."

"You have brought him here to betray me."

"That is not so," exclaimed Billy. "I came of my own accord, to see her again, perhaps for the last time. I had hoped that you would get away. I had thought that nobody had seen you, that nobody knew that you had been here, and I believed that you had gained nothing, had learned nothing, but now — "

"Well, now? What then?" demanded Karl.

"You can't go."

"I shall go, and nothing shall prevent me."

"I can't permit it."

Karl laughed. "I might have known," he said bitterly, but speaking easily, as one who felt quite sure of himself, and of his strength, "that a man who would betray his country would betray his brother."

"I have betrayed neither the one nor the other."

"You could have saved your Fatherland in its hour of travail," cried Karl, "you are a traitor to your native land."

"I have a higher obligation."

"There is no obligation greater than that which a man owes to the land of his birth."

"Unless he deliberately assumes that obligation."

"You are a Prussian."

"I am an American."

"What do the other men in your service think of that?"

"Why —" The shot went home, as Billy recalled what some of his brother officers did think on that subject.

Karl looked at him and laughed coarsely.

"It does not matter what they think," said Billy. "It is what I think that counts. I am an American citizen."

"Skin deep!"

"I took the oath of allegiance, and I have renewed that oath a thousand times, in every act of my life, in every salute to the colors."

"It is a temporary allegiance. You were born a German, and once a German always a German. This country is a mongrel nation, made up of derelicts from all the world. Their business is here, their hearts are elsewhere. How can you stand against your own blood, when the destiny of kin and country rests in your hands?"

"The destiny of Germany does n't rest in my hands," Billy answered. "Your nerves are in a dreadful state, Karl."

"We planned to place it there."

"You are quite mad."

"Mad! Why did we have you made Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief? Do you think we merely wanted to tickle your vanity? It was because that assignment would put you, in time of action, in the flag conning tower, with the Admiral and his Chief-of-Staff."

"What of that?"

"Once they were out of the way, the fate of the war would have been in your keeping."

"Karl!"

"The battle would have been yours — to throw away. You could have delivered the North Atlantic fleet into our hands, manœuvred it across our mine fields!"

"Time enough for you to be figuring on what to do with the American fleet when you have defeated the British fleet," remarked Billy, drily.

"We shall take care of that," cried Karl.

Something in his voice made Billy look at him sharply.

"We are coming out!"

"When?"

Karl's voice grew tense. "The day is at hand!"

"And then?"

"It will be America's turn. Then we shall starve England, and win the war. You had a part to play in this, a great part, planned long ago, and when the hour came you proved false to your own blood."

"Stop, Karl! You do not know what you are saying."

"It was all planned, I tell you," Karl went on, his great excitement increasing, his voice rising. "You would have been in a position to give every order to the fleet by radio, every signal."

"What would the Admiral and the Chief-of-Staff have been doing all this time?" demanded Billy, smiling in spite of himself as he looked into Karl's face, alive with emotion.

"My God!" said Karl, "would odds of two to one have proved too great for you? Then you are no brother of mine."

"You don't mean —" Billy's voice sank to an incredulous whisper.

"You could have taken care of both of them, as the action began. When they had been done for — no one would have known. You would have been in command of the whole fleet."

"Done for!" said Billy, his face white.

"God! you could have killed them both with one shot."

"You scoundrel!"

"That was your chance," Karl went on recklessly, his whole body shaking convulsively, his forehead wet with sweat. "The Emperor would have conferred on you the Order of the Red Eagle, yes, brother, you might have been a Prince of the Empire, you might have had wealth, and honors — and the woman you love. That is what you have thrown away by your treason. But there is a hope yet. It is not too late. There is still time, if you will say the word, if you will promise to help your Fatherland."

"I do not think you are naturally a villain, Karl," said Billy, looking into his brother's twitching face, "I think you are a crazy man."

"You refuse to aid us, to save your own kindred in their hour of agony?"

"My own brother!" cried Billy.

"You mongrel!" said Karl, looking into the depths of his eyes, his passionate voice full of bitter scorn and contempt. "You are no longer my brother."

"I fear that is true, Karl."

"I disown you."

"You have changed so, Karl, I scarcely know you for the brother of my boyhood."

"The change is in you, you traitor."

"Frieda!" called Billy, "where 's the telephone? I must call up the Charlestown Navy Yard."

Karl laughed. "You are rather late in reaching a decision to expose me," he said with a sneer.

"I thought at first that you had come here to corrupt me," said Billy, slowly. "That was personal, Karl. I strained my conscience, and because you are my twin, I thought I would let you go back unopposed, since you had learned nothing here. But I find you are a spy, and worse. It breaks my heart to do it, but I must do my duty now."

"Don't shoot, Karl!" Frieda, who had been watching them, her nails dug into her palms, threw herself between the two men, while Margaretha, a smile on her lips, sank into the arm chair by the fire, and pulled the pointer into her lap.

Karl pushed Elfrieda roughly out of his way, and the pistol in his hand moved to the waist line.

"What did you do at the Department?" demanded Billy, his voice low and even, his eyes never for an instant leaving Karl's.

"He took some papers," cried Elfrieda, hysterically; "thank God, I 've told you."

"And now I 've got to kill him," said Karl, and pulled the trigger.

The weapon missed fire, and Karl looked up into the muzzle of a big, black forty-four.

"Your gun jammed. That 's the trouble with those automatics, they get all clogged up with grit and dirt and dampness. We 're going back to the old revolver in our service. Throw it over into that cushion!" And Billy pushed the black barrel into his brother's stomach.

Karl tossed the automatic into the chair, and Billy picked it up, and shoved his own pistol back into the holster under his shoulder.

"Mine was empty," he explained, "had to shoot three big dogs on the way down to the house. I 'd have been rather up against it if there had been four."

"Ah!" said Margaretha, "I had wondered."

"Damn you," cried Karl, fervently.

"Thanks. And now, about that trip to the Navy Department. So that is why you shaved those handsome whiskers off? I should have thought of that."

Mrs. Sabiston got up languidly, moved over to the mantelpiece, stroked Bruno's ears for a moment, and then walked toward the door.

"I beg your pardon, Margaretha," said Billy, "but won't you please be seated."

"I 'm afraid I don't quite understand."

"I hate to lose an audience."

"I shall be right back."

"If you would just as soon!" He pointed to a chair.

"Oh," said Mrs. Sabiston, and sat down.

"Thank you. So, Karl, you quit the jungle and appeared for the first time in eight years in the civilization of a smooth face. And then you went to the Navy Department. What next?"

"Take that gun out of my stomach."

"We have n't come to that part yet," smiled Billy.

"You damned — "

"No profanity, remember, there are ladies present. So you walked in, and by Jove! — well, it took nerve, anyhow, Karl, even if you could pose for my photograph. Now go on with the story."

Karl looked intently at Mrs. Sabiston, who made a barely perceptible sign that she understood what was in his mind.

"Karl, did you have the audacity to attend the conference this morning of the Board of Strategy?" There was deep anxiety in Billy's voice.

"God! I was there, and never thought of it. I am a fool."

"That is what I have been telling you," laughed Billy, his blue eyes smiling again. "And now, how about those papers?"

"I have no papers," answered Karl, doggedly.

"They are in his pocket," interjected Elfrieda, who was standing by the big table in the middle of the room. "They are yours, you have a right to know."

"It seems to me that Frieda has decided *not* to go back to Germany," observed Mrs. Sabiston, sweetly.

"Nobody is going back to Germany," amended Billy.

"Indeed?" smiled Margaretha.

"Now Karl," said Billy, "don't become too enthusiastic over passing those papers to me. Keep your hands out like that, there, I 'll find them," and he felt in Karl's coat, and brought out the black leather case.

"Those are the papers," said Elfrieda. "Oh, what have I done, what have I done!"

"You have betrayed me, you have betrayed your mother and sisters, you have betrayed your Fatherland, that is what you have done," cried Karl.

"Are these all the papers you took?" asked Billy, smiling to the eyes.

"He took nothing else," said Frieda.

"Have you examined the contents?"

Elfrieda shook her head.

"I 'll answer none of your questions, you damned traitor. Take that gun away." Karl flashed another signal to Mrs. Sabiston, who inclined her shapely head.

"Open it, Frieda," and Billy passed the case to her.

With nervous fingers that shook so that she could scarcely loosen the fasteners, Elfrieda opened the black leather case. Two small packages, tied with purple ribbon, dropped out. She stooped and picked them up, and cried:

"My letters!"

"All you have ever written to me, all these long years," smiled Billy. "I 've always carried them about with me wherever I have gone. That is all that the case contains, and Karl put his head in a noose to get them."

"Why, no," said Frieda, "here is something else, two bits of paper, folded up. Shall I take them out? See, they are under the lining."

"I had forgotten about them," answered Billy. "I must have put them in there years ago."

Elfrieda took them out carefully, two sheets, beginning to turn yellow, and rubbed quite black from contact with the leather, and spread them upon the table.

"'The United States District Court —' Why, Billy," she cried, "they are your father's naturalization papers."

"I remember the day he gave them to me," said Billy, his voice hushed, "the day he died, and I remember, too, the night he brought them home, and showed them to us, you remember, Karl, don't you, how glad and proud he was? And he told us that he was an American, and that he had made us Americans, too, and — God help you, Karl, you are an American citizen now!"

"Take that gun away, and I'll show you what I am."

"It's true, Karl, don't you see? I've been an American since my childhood, I've always known that. When father became an American citizen we were minors, and so we became American citizens, too."

"I went back to Germany," said Karl.

"Were you ever naturalized a German subject?"

"Of course not."

"Then you are an American citizen today, just the same kind of an American as I am, as good an American as Frieda, or Mrs. Sabiston, who were born here. That is the law."

"What law?" asked Karl.

"The law of the United States."

"Germany does not recognize that law," replied Karl.

"The trouble with Germany is that she does n't recognize any law," said Billy, " but the time is coming when she will have to recognize a good many that she now ignores, and when that time does come this naturalization law that made you and me Americans will be at the top of the list."

" Put up that gun."

" You are the traitor, Karl!"

" Damn you, let me go."

" I can't let you go. Frieda, call up the Charlestown Navy Yard — for me."

There was no whit of color in her face as she started for the alcove, where the telephone stood upon a table. Her hands hung limply at her side. " You are tearing the heartstrings out of me," she said, " tearing me to pieces, killing me, both of you."

" You will denounce me?" Karl looked from Elfrieda into Billy's eyes.

" I must. It is no longer personal, it is a duty. You are a spy."

" Then you will have to inform against her, also," said Karl, and looked at Frieda; " she came to aid me."

" For that!"

" What else would bring her here at such a time as this?"

" It is not so. Say that it is not so, Frieda."

Elfrieda bowed her head.

"It is true?"

"She was to go back by another route, and take copies of anything that I might obtain. If one failed, the other would get through. She has Italian passports, forged. She told me the paper in your watch contained the combination of your safe."

"Elfrieda! You did not do that!" She did not speak.

"She guided me to the Navy Department, showed me your room, talked to the man Wallis while I took this damn leather case. What you do to me, you do to her. Remember that."

"Say something, Elfrieda." Billy looked at her imploringly.

"What can she say?" cried Karl. "We planned this in Berlin, and now we are ready to go back. Come with us, brother, and you shall marry her there. I give you one last chance, for your honor — and your happiness."

"Call up the Navy Yard, Elfrieda." She moved on a step.

"A man who would betray his country and his brother would betray the woman he loves," said Karl. "He would betray anything."

"What he said of me," said Elfrieda, steadying her way across the room at table and chair, "is true, except one part. They sent me here because

I knew you — and God help me, I let them do it. I was wild, mad with fervor. I had seen my friends go to the front, and not return. I had seen Helena a bride and a widow in a few weeks of horror while the slaughter at Verdun was going on. I had seen those I loved weeping for their sons and fathers. They sent me, and I came."

"I understand, dear." The tenderness had come back to Billy's voice.

"I saw you, and I began to think," she went on, "to lie awake at nights, my brain burning, my soul in torment. And you reminded me that I was born here. I thought I should go mad. I tried to think that I was n't an American, I tried to tell myself so, and I could n't. It kept coming back, coming back, coming back. It gave me no peace, no rest, for I saw then what lay beyond. And Karl came!" She swayed forward, and saved herself from falling, clinging to a chair.

"Don't cry, dear heart."

"And then — I refused to do what he ordered, and he made me. He held that pistol, that you hold now in your hand, in the pocket of his coat, and pressed it up against me as we walked along, as we went into your office, and I saw by his eyes that he would kill me, as he said he would, if I failed him."

Billy's eyes were shining, but all he said was: "Now call up the Navy Yard, Elfrieda, it is getting late."

"*Halt!*" cried Karl. "Don't touch that 'phone. You and I will be away from here in a few minutes now, but do you want to betray Margaretha? She must remain."

"Don't bother about the Navy Yard," commanded Billy, crisply. "Ask Central to connect you with the nearest police station, the sheriff, anybody."

Mrs. Sabiston left her chair, walked to the mantelpiece, picked up a Chinese porcelain vase, and hurled it with all her strength against the door opening into the hall. She threw back her head, the corn-silk hair tumbling about her white shoulders, and shouted:

"*Hilfe! Hilfe!*"

Billy circled around his brother, keeping him covered with the gun, and backed against the fireplace, facing the door.

"Max! Ludwig!" screamed Margaretha.

A door slammed somewhere in the distant part of the big house, and a moment later a huge blonde man, with a closely-cropped head, came in, his eyes staring with excitement, a rifle in his hand.

There was the bark of an automatic, and the big blonde man dropped his Winchester, and threw his hand to his mouth, smearing his face with blood.

"Never mind the 'phone now, Frieda," said Billy. "Pick up that rifle and bring it to me. Stay where you are, Karl!"

"Do not move, Elfrieda," commanded Karl; "you are under my orders."

She hesitated.

"We are on the same side, you and I, dear," said Billy.

"She came to aid me," cried Karl, thickly. "Remember, Frieda, you swore you would be true. I hold you to that oath."

"She must choose between us," Billy answered softly; "she has come to the parting of the ways." He turned his head for an instant, and smiled at her.

"All right, Billy," cried Frieda, her voice suddenly strong and vibrant. She started to obey, but stopped, and stood listening. There was the clatter of hurrying feet on the stairs, and the next instant the butler was in the doorway.

"The men! Ludwig," said Mrs. Sabiston.

"*Sie kommen.*"

A tall, distinguished-looking man, with a heavy face and brown mustache, rushed in, drawing a pistol as he came. Behind his back were five young fellows, smooth-shaved of pate and pink and white of skin.

"Get him!" commanded Karl in German, and jerked his head toward Billy.

Billy threw his gun as he spoke, and pulled the trigger.

"Confound your automatic, Karl," he said, "the darned thing's jammed again. There must be a defective cartridge in there."

"Get him!" repeated Karl, and laughed.

Elfrieda had seized the rifle, and backed off until the table was between them.

"Karl," she said, "if that man shoots Billy I am going to kill you," and she laid the repeater over the lamp, and stood there tensely, her finger on the trigger, the muzzle covering his heart.

"Get her!" said Karl, and flung himself upon his brother, trying for his throat.

"Look out, Frieda! He's going to shoot. Drop!" shouted Billy, and landed a right hook on the point of Karl's jaw that sent him reeling against the table.

The man with the brown mustache had moved, so that he had the girl away from the others. He raised his pistol. The pointer dog sprang across the room, barking. There was the crash of shattered glass, the French window opening upon the east piazza suddenly collapsed, and a quiet-looking, middle-aged man in spectacles entered Mrs. Sabiston's exclusive drawing room without the formality of sending in his card.

As Mr. Monson's Colt cracked, the man with the brown mustache lost all interest in the proceedings, and the next instant several gentlemen connected with the United States Secret Service had appeared out of the blackness of the night, and were busily engaged in checking up half a dozen interned German sailors from Norfolk, who had broken their parole some weeks before, and departed without leaving their address.

CHAPTER XXIII

STRAIGHT OUT TO SEA, FIVE MILES

"Which of you is which?" asked Mr. Monson presently, when the round-up had been completed, and two of the Secret Service men had laid the gentleman with the brown mustache on the divan, and had announced that he was merely shot through the shoulder, nothing serious. "That 's the one I saw on the train — and you?"

Billy told him his name.

"And this man — your brother, of course, could n't be anything else. He looks like a naval officer, too, you can always tell a sailor, but I don't seem to remember — "

"He is a Captain in the German navy," said Billy.

Mr. Monson whistled. "As bad as that!"

"A whole lot worse than that." Billy's voice faltered, but he held his head erect. "He is a German spy."

Mr. Monson's eyes shone. "And your brother, your twin brother!" He held out his hand, silently, and Billy, hesitating, took it.

"It was no easy thing to do," he smiled sadly.

" Tough, I call it," admitted Mr. Monson, " about the hardest I ever heard of." He turned, and took a mental inventory of Karl, who sat in the big arm chair by the fireplace, his eyes roving restlessly, a look of defiance in his face.

" Just arrived? " asked Mr. Monson.

" Just going," replied Billy.

" Oh! Where? "

" Back to Germany."

" French or British steamer? " and Mr. Monson grinned at his little jest.

" Submarine," Billy answered shortly.

" That 's how he came, I suppose."

Billy nodded.

" Submarine coming in here? " He looked out of the window. " What kind of water out there? "

" Not familiar with it," said Billy, " I have been wondering if the submarine would come in here."

" How long has he been in the United States? "

" Several days."

" You did n't give him away? "

" I was trying to telephone for the police when you burst in."

Mr. Monson nodded his head briskly in approval.

" Been doing much? "

" Nothing, so far as I am aware. He shaved his face and got into the Navy Department."

"Oh!" interjected Mr. Monson. "He wore a beard."

"At first. He went to my apartment in Washington — and there he — he shaved."

"I see," observed Mr. Monson, shaking his head again, "you went back on him, threw him down, and then he had to go it alone. How did he get you out of the way?" Mr. Monson had come up very close to him, and stood on the rug, rising up and down on his toes, interested from chin to soles.

"We had a bit of a fight," Billy began slowly, "nothing very serious. He got me, and before I came around he had me tied down on the bed, ropes and trunk straps and things."

"And then he shaved himself — put on some of your clothes, I suppose — and beat it, went to the Navy Department — and what did he get?"

"Some private papers of mine, out of my safe."

"Strictly personal?"

"That is all I had in there."

Mr. Monson chuckled. "And then they came over on the B. & O. — quick get-away. Mrs. Sabiston, that 's the blonde. Who is his other accomplice, the pretty girl with the dark hair?" And he jerked his finger over his shoulder, to where Elfrieda stood listlessly at the window, looking out through the night at the sea.

"She —" began Billy, and came to an embarrassed pause.

"Presumably Italian, weight one hundred and thirty, height five feet seven," nodded Mr. Monson, talking half to himself. "That 's Peters' friend."

"Miss Sigbert is the one who sent the telegram to the janitor to go to my apartment and turn me loose," cried Billy, eagerly.

"The dickens she did," said Mr. Monson, as if rather disappointed to hear it. "She — of course she did — sent the telegram from New London."

"Yes, that 's it," smiled Billy, quickly, "but how the deuce — you Secret Service men seem to know everything."

Mr. Monson chuckled and enveloped himself in mystery. "But wait a minute, hold on!" he added, "if she sent you a telegram from New London —"

"Told the janitor to go to my bedroom and look for my watch."

"But if she waited until she got to New London to do that, how do you happen to be here? You could n't have made it by airship."

"The man whose apartment I was using temporarily, in his absence, unexpectedly returned," explained Billy, and dried his hands upon his handkerchief.

"Well, we 'll see," said Mr. Monson, doubtfully.

" And then you came here, knowing where they were going."

" I did n't know. I found it out by accident at the Willard."

" You did n't know that your brother had been at the Department? "

" I learned that when I reached here tonight."

" The dogs did n't furnish the only surprise. That was a good piece of work, much obliged."

" How the — "

" Say, look here," interrupted Mr. Monson, and lowering his voice, " I 'll bet you saw that — saw something on the roof, between the chimneys, hey? " He laughed. " And then you walked around, and dropped in on them, and — the fight began. I 'm glad I decided to come down tonight. Had a hunch. Always act on hunches, always. You 're all right, Commander Hartmann. I knew that a man who could write a letter like that was a good sort, could n't be anything else."

" Letter? " questioned Billy.

" Letter to Miss Sigbert — say — well I 'll be — " He turned, and studied Elfrieda intently. " Miss Sigbert — is that the one? "

" The one? " asked Billy, wonderingly.

" The Miss Sigbert you wrote a letter to the night you arrived in Washington? "

"Yes," said Billy, "that is the Miss Sigbert."

"You are beginning to interest me," and Mr. Monson drew him further into the alcove. "She was supposed to be in Berlin, then, and now she is — here."

"How the devil do you know that?" demanded Billy.

"It 's my business to know," and Mr. Monson drew the cloak of mystery a little closer about him and polished his eyeglasses with a self-satisfied air. "So she was in Berlin?"

"Yes."

"He came over by submarine, and she took another route, probably through Italy or Spain. She was putting one over about that telegram to the janitor — accomplice."

"Was n't she about to shoot him with that rifle when you came in?"

"That is so," admitted Mr. Monson, doubtfully. "You don't think — "

"Think? I know." Billy was eager again. "He tried to make her help him in something he wanted done, but she refused."

"And on the show-down she pulled the gun on him? Hum! Well, we 'll see. . . . What the deuce was that?"

It was a loud shriek. It came, evidently, from the floor above, and was followed by another, and by frantic hammering upon a door. Mrs. Sabiston started up, and then sank back into her chair, and the look of doubt and anxiety deepened in her eyes, that had been half closed as she sat apart from the rest, busy with her thoughts.

"A woman screaming," said Billy, and started for the door. On the threshold he paused, as another shrill feminine cry of rage and excitement echoed through the hall.

"Up the stairs!" shouted Mr. Monson, and followed Billy, two steps at a time, one of the Secret Service men at their heels. They stopped before a door on the second floor. Somebody within was beating upon it a frenzied tattoo, and a woman's half inarticulate voice, choked with wrath, was yelling, "Let me out!"

Mr. Monson tried the knob. "Locked," said he. "Anybody got a jimmy?"

"Let me try." Billy lifted the knob, put his shoulder against the door, the muscles in his arms and back stood out under his coat, and with a final mighty heave the panels splintered and he crashed into the room.

Billy had encountered the indignant lady who now confronted him, armed with a brass curtain rod, so frequently, and under such a variety of circumstances, that he was no more surprised than he would have been if he had suddenly met her on the boardwalk at Atlantic City or caught a glimpse of her, in a cab, at Charing Cross. It seemed the most natural thing in the world for her to be there. He put out his hand and said:

"Hello, Corrie."

"You dear man!" exclaimed Mrs. Winters, throwing down her weapon and snatching up a mirror from the dressing-table. "How perfectly adorable of you to come here to rescue me. Lead me from this place and shake me up a cocktail," and with a final squint at the mirror she stepped over the broken door into the hall.

"Anything to oblige you, Mrs. Winters," laughed Billy.

"Mrs. Winters!" exclaimed Mr. Monson dramatically. "Introduce me. I have been anxious to meet you for some time."

"Pardon me, Mr. Monson, let me present you to Mrs. Winters; Corrie, Mr. Monson, of the Secret Service."

"Secret Service!" cried Corrie. "My dear Mr. Monson, get out your notebook and pencil, I have some things to tell you that will make your hair stand on end. Billy, a cigarette, please, I 'm perishing!"

"Where is Peters?" asked Mr. Monson, his eyes snapping behind his glasses.

"Peters? Never heard of the man."

"That 's so, my mistake, Peters knows you, I was thinking you knew Peters. It 's Hannibal G. White that you know."

"I should say I do know him," agreed Corrie, emphatically, "why, do you know — do you want me to tell you everything?"

"Everything. But wait a moment, that must be the wireless room, there at the end of the hall."

"I looked after that," reported Roberts, coming up. "Complete plant. The operator is the man you winged, the chap with the brown mustache."

Mr. Monson nodded. "We 'll get around to that later," he said; "and now, Mrs. Winters, I 'll listen. You 'd better go back to the drawing room, Commander, while we talk up here." He led the way into the wireless room, and gave her the chair at the table. "Everything, Mrs. Winters," he said, "especially about that cablegram you sent from Hong Kong."

"Mrs. Sabiston has been blabbing," pouted Corrie.

"What does Mrs. Sabiston know about this?" asked Mr. Monson, showing even more interest.

"Then it must have been Captain von Hagenah," ventured Corrie. "I hope he did n't go too far," she added to herself; "well, anyhow, burnt letters make no scandals."

"Who 's von Hagenah?" asked Mr. Monson, his eyes fairly twinkling, "a friend of yours?"

"Sir!" said Corrie. "He 's a perfectly horrible creature, I assure you. He 's the man who dragged me up here and locked me in that room, and — and —" She rubbed her lips with the back of her hand at the recollection of von Hagenah's kiss.

"Start at the beginning," said Mr. Monson, crisply, and settled himself comfortably on the edge of the table by the wireless instruments.

Billy went back to the drawing room, where the Secret Service men, alertly on their job, were keeping a close watch upon Mrs. Sabiston and her friends without in the least appearing to do so. Margaretha sat at one side of the fireplace, Karl, buried in the big arm chair, at the other. Billy, going to Elfrieda at the window, which had been propped back into place to keep out the cold, saw that across the hearth rug they were conversing silently with eyes, and brows, and every twitching nerve of face and finger.

Elfrieda was in no mood to talk. Her nervousness had passed, but Billy was more alarmed by the cold, emotionless frigidity that held her in its grasp than he would have been by hysteria. Her eyes had faded to a listless gray, her face was dull, expressionless, and white.

Mr. Monson, followed by Mrs. Winters, came in. They did not speak. She took a seat by him in the alcove, while he picked up the telephone receiver, and said crisply:

"Long-distance."

He waited. They all waited. There was no sound but the crackling of the fire as the back-log burned through and fell across the andirons.

"New York," said Mr. Monson, in the same pungent voice, and gave a number.

They waited again. The man on the divan stirred slightly, and groaned a muttered curse under his breath. After a while the telephone bell rang, and Mr. Monson answered.

"Is Calder there?" he asked, his lips at the receiver. "Oh, hello, Calder. This is Monson, from Washington. I want you to get Hannibal G. White, tonight. Yes, that 's the one, 45 Broadway. I don't know where he lives. What? Yes, I think I 've got the goods. And say, ask New London for a complete set of all telegrams filed there at the New Haven railroad station today, and send them to me at Washington. Thanks, that 's all. What 's that? Thank God, now our hands will be untied. Good night."

He hung up the receiver, and turned with a broad smile upon his face.

" Good news," announced Mr. Monson, joyously; " the New York branch says that the Senate tonight passed the resolution declaring war on Germany."

Elfrieda's knees weakened beneath her, and she clasped Billy's arm tightly.

" What is it? " he asked quickly, bending down.

" Nothing, I felt faint. I am quite all right now."

Mrs. Sabiston and Karl sprang to their feet. Then he, shrugging his shoulders, sat down again, and continued gazing into the fire, but Margaretha stood steadying herself at the mantelpiece. She turned at the sound of Mr. Monson's voice.

" You are under arrest, Mrs. Sabiston," he said.

" For what, pray? "

" Various things, I need not go into details."

" You have no warrant."

" Oh, that will be all right," smiled Mr. Monson, easily.

" You have no evidence, I have done nothing."

Mr. Monson looked at Karl, and grinned.

Margaretha followed his look. " I could not turn an old friend from my house."

Mr. Monson waved his arm to embrace the closely-cropped men who sat together on the big couch, their faces blank, their blue eyes expressionless.

"My servants," said Margaretha.

"What is this, anyhow, Mrs. Sabiston," he asked drily, "a house or a yacht?"

"You have no right to insult me, sir."

"I beg your pardon, just a bit of pleasantry, that 's all," Mr. Monson hastened to say, making the lady a very gallant bow. "I was merely amused by your nautical taste in housekeeping."

"I can employ whom I choose."

"And the wireless on your roof?"

"A mere toy," said Margaretha, but her voice shook; "it shall be taken down immediately."

"Oh, yes indeed," agreed Mr. Monson. "And that man?" he pointed to the divan.

"My — my under butler," said Margaretha, hesitatingly.

"Quite a come-down for a Count," observed Mr. Monson. "You know who he is, Mrs. Sabiston, so let us understand one another; that is von Baribel. He is under indictment for trying to blow up the Union Station tunnel, in Washington. You are harboring here a nest of enemies of the United States."

"I shall not submit to this indignity," cried Margaretha. "It is quite evident that you do not know who I am. Sabiston is my name. I own the Sabiston shoe factories at Brockton, and — "

"I have on a pair," smiled Mr. Monson, and remembered what Peters had said. "By the way, Mrs. Sabiston, will you kindly inform me where Mr. Peters — of course, you don't know him by that name. Where is the man you hired to operate your motorboat?"

"Why — why — " stammered Margaretha.

"You told me the Secret Service did n't know anything," said Karl, sullenly, in an aside.

"Where is he?" demanded Mr. Monson, sharply. "He is one of our men."

"You will not see him again in a hurry," said Margaretha, vindictively, and bit her lip, seeing she had made a blunder.

"Oh!" said Mr. Monson, and spoke volumes in a monosyllable.

"Be careful, Margaretha," admonished Karl in a whisper, "you will ruin us all."

"Ludwig!" commanded Margaretha, "hang out the American flag."

"Tonight, *gnädige Frau?*" asked the butler, in German.

"At once," said Margaretha. "Let me see, where is it?"

"There is one under the cellar stairs," said Ludwig, after thinking a moment, "I was using it the other day in the big chest to pack around some —"

"Ludwig! Be silent."

"It is hardly necessary to put out the flag to show your patriotism, Mrs. Sabiston," interrupted Mr. Monson. "There are other ways of doing that — and of not doing it. Besides, we can't spare dear old Ludwig, but one of my men will go down cellar to see what 's in that box," and he gave an order, briskly, with his eloquent thumb.

Mrs. Sabiston swayed forward, and Karl, springing to her side, caught her just in time.

"What is it?" he whispered, as she settled limply into his arms.

"The box," she said, her lips close to his ear.

"What is in it?"

"The bombs White sent."

"Good God!"

"I shall be ruined," said Mrs. Sabiston; "they will hound me to death, confiscate my property. There is no hope now, for anything."

"There is always hope," whispered Karl, holding her close to him. "There is still one desperate chance. Will you take it with me?"

She swayed forward, and her lips touched his cheek, and clung there.

"She is fainting," said Karl, and took her in his arms; "let me get her to the air, quickly." There was the sharp note of command in his voice. He bore her to the window, Mr. Monson and his men falling back. Her head was on his shoulder, her eyes half closed, but the color had come back into her face, her velvet skin was pink to where her breast lay close against his heart.

Karl reached the window, and opened the shattered frame with his foot.

"Whiskey!" he called. "Quick!"

"Bring some whiskey, somebody," echoed Mr. Monson, much concerned.

"The electric switch is there, at your left, just inside the window," whispered Margaretha, and threw out her hand. "I have it," she added.

Karl stepped clear of the sill.

"Do you think you can make it?" he asked, his lips nearly touching hers.

"Yes."

"Then come!"

She turned off the electric lights as he put her down, and the whole house was then in darkness. They crossed the piazza in a mad flight, and ran like deer, keeping in the shelter of the shrubbery, her skirts gathered about her knees with both hands, her silk-clad legs skimming the ground, and Karl behind her, urging her on.

"Damnation!" Mr. Monson was suddenly frantic. "Where's the light? Find that switch, somebody, it must be near the window. Where's my overcoat! Get through there, somebody, and after 'em, hard now, I tell you, don't let them get away. But don't shoot the woman!" He groped for his overcoat, finally found it over the back of a chair, took his searchlight from his pocket, and flashed it.

"Here's the switch," called Billy, and turned it on. There was a rush, Mr. Monson leading the way to the lawn, shrouded in the impenetrable darkness that precedes the dawn. Beyond the rim of the pathway of light made by his pocket electric the night seemed solid.

"Quickly, Frieda!" whispered Billy, watching them go, "where are your passports?"

"In my satchel," she answered. "Why, Billy —"

"Find them, hurry."

She brought them to him with a frightened look, and he took them, crossed the room with a long stride, and threw them upon the blaze. "We will wait here," he said, his voice calm once more, "these men might try to break away." They walked to the window, just as the pointer dog, that had been running around whining, dashed past them. Outside they could hear Mr. Monson.

"They must have gone over the cliff," he called. "If they cut back our men will get them."

The men had reached the edge of the precipice, where they stopped, undecided what to do.

"Don't see how they could have made it," growled Mr. Monson, looking down the steep chaos of ragged boulder.

"There goes the dog," shouted Roberts, "he 's following them. There they go!"

Margaretha had darted into the path that ran through her rose garden, Karl at her side. They reached the cliff at the top of the stairway that led to the beach. As they stood for an instant poised for the downward flight their bodies stood out against the wintry sky and the scud of hurrying clouds.

"There they are!" repeated Mr. Monson, and plunged away. They came at last to the steps.

"Down here," he cried. "Gad! what steps, I 'll break my neck. Ice, at this time of year! I never saw such a climate. Well, come on, this is the way they went."

They picked their way down with the aid of the pocket lights, twisting and turning between enormous rocks, some of them as large as a house. Calling to one another in the darkness, they came out at last on the shingle beach.

"See anything of them?" asked Mr. Monson.

"Not a sign," replied Roberts. "Wait! What was that? Listen!"

They stood still.

To their straining ears came a sound as saucy and tantalizing as it was unmistakable:

Putt! putt! putt! putt! putt! b — rrrrr! putt! putt!

"Motorboat!" The voice sounded little like Mr. Monson's customary cheerful tone.

"Stung!" ejaculated Roberts. "Look! There they are."

The full moon bored a hole in the pall of night and came plunging through the opening. Belated cloud drifts floated across her smiling face, hurrying on to meet the sun, and were gone. A radiant shaft of beaming mellowness streamed down, fell across the pinnacle rock, bathing it in a soft, white light, touched the south window, under the big chimney, illuminating it brightly, and then went dancing out to sea where it laid a silver pathway across the desert of waters.

"There!" cried Roberts.

Far out beyond the reefs the motorboat rose for an instant upon the crest of an on-rushing breaker, held there for one brief, fleeting instant, like a gull at rest, and then went slanting down into the trough of the sea, a spray of sparkling foam at her bow, where the slender figure of Mrs. Sabiston stood framed against the night that lay beyond. Then the heaving wilderness closed down, and the picture was blotted out.

They walked back, climbing the slippery stairs, feeling their way across the lawn. Mr. Monson's face told the story as he entered the drawing room.

"Gone?" asked Billy, who was standing by the big arm chair at the fireplace, where Elfrieda now sat.

Mr. Monson nodded dejectedly.

"Sorry I could n't help, but I had to look after these fellows. You forgot them."

"So I did," confessed Mr. Monson. "Well, we 've got *them,* at least. Thank you for your thoughtfulness, although they would hardly have got away; we are guarded at the back."

"How did they manage it?" Billy asked. He felt neither regret nor satisfaction. Since Karl would take back with him, if he escaped, nothing of value to the enemy, he felt that perhaps things had turned out for the best.

"Motorboat," answered Mr. Monson, shortly.

"Then the submarine must be waiting for them off here."

"That is so," replied Mr. Monson, "no doubt about it. They know where to go." A line from Mr. Peters' letter flashed into his memory. "Gad! I see it all now — straight out to sea, five miles!"

"Five miles at sea in an evening gown on a night like this," said Billy, incredulously. "It will kill her."

"Oh, no it won't," Corrie smiled, "she told me she never had a cold. But then, think what she eats, buttered cereal and spinach."

"It will be ten miles in all, at the very least," Billy added.

"Not ten, five," insisted Mr. Monson.

"But she must come back."

"I don't believe she will," chuckled Mr. Monson. "We 've got too much on her, and she knows that we have."

"She is n't coming back," agreed Corrie, "but not for that reason. Did you see her eyes when he picked her up in his arms? Well, I did."

"Oh," said Mr. Monson, "so that is it?"

"What makes you believe they have gone straight out from here five miles?" interrupted Billy, who had been thinking.

"We had a man here, running Mrs. Sabiston's motorboat. She made him cover the course every day, five nautical miles."

"Where is he?"

"We have n't a trace of him. He has disappeared."

"By Jove! Billy's voice was shrill with excitement. "They kidnapped him, don't you see, the night my brother Karl came. This Mr. Peters went out, and while they were lying alongside the submarine they pulled your man aboard. You won't hear from him for a considerable time."

"Well, there are some advantages in having a man on a German submarine," said Mr. Monson, optimistically. "If Peters were carried off by a balloon he'd come back some day with a counterfeiter. He'll show up — like as not in command of the U-boat."

Billy went swiftly to the telephone.

"What's up?" asked Mr. Monson.

"I must notify the Charlestown Navy Yard. They'll have to send a destroyer out, but I'm afraid it's too late now. Hold on! I remember something, there's a German submarine base — Where was it — Karl started to say — "

"Oh! I have it." Corrie had sprung to her feet. "He told me."

"Who told you?" demanded Mr. Monson.

"That perfectly odious Captain von Hagenah."

"Say, we seem to have missed him," exclaimed Mr. Monson. "We must try to get him."

"He should be burned in oil," said Corrie.

"Let's see, what was his description, again?"

" About Billy's build," Corrie went on, " same kind of legs and shoulders, but a horrible creature, face covered to the eyes with a big blonde beard."

The light was beginning to dawn on Billy. " That must have been Karl. It was Karl."

" Why, it was almost as though I had known him," exclaimed Corrie, " positively uncanny. I felt that I had known him before, although I knew I had n't. Your twin brother ! " She stood looking down at the rug. " So that is why," she added to herself — " I thought there was something familiar — about — the lips."

" He mentioned a submarine base, you said," interrupted Mr. Monson.

" He gave an order about it to one of the men, told him to keep in touch with it."

" Where ? " cried Mr. Monson, impatiently.

" Caribou — Caribou Island, that 's it," cried Corrie, triumphantly.

Billy picked up the receiver. " Charlestown Navy Yard," he said crisply, and waited. " Hello ! Navy Yard ? Give me the duty officer. Yes, yes. . . . This is Lieutenant-Commander Hartmann. There 's a German submarine off — what 's the name of this place ? — Namaschet — five miles out, and hello ! I have information that there is a base at Caribou Island. Maine coast, that 's it. Get busy — thanks. Good night."

" And now to get back to Washington," said Mr. Monson. " I 'll have to let the Boston business go. I want to see this man White, and take a look at his papers."

Corrie stared dreamily into the fireplace, and smiled.

" You will go back with us, Mrs. Winters? You have been of great value — " He drew near, and lowered his voice. " We could use you to very good advantage, if you could see your way clear — the compensation would be, well, we would be liberal to a woman like you."

" I 'll do anything to be of assistance, to serve my country," said Corrie, " and I 'll enjoy it — if what you want me to do is what I think it is."

" Smart woman ! " commented Mr. Monson, beaming approval. " I have n't the slightest doubt that you will build a fire-proof hotel in Hong Kong that will — "

" I love that ! " cried Corrie. " But how on earth — " The wonder in her eyes was incense to his soul.

" I must get back to Washington," interrupted Billy, joining them. " I expect to receive my orders now without delay. Let us take the first train."

He turned to Frieda. "Of course you will — I am sure that Mrs. Winters — "

"I hardly know," said Frieda, doubtfully.

"Miss Fralli is still my guest," said Corrie, helpfully, noting his anxiety and embarrassment. "Certainly she will go back with me."

"Miss Fralli!" exclaimed Mr. Monson, and took off his spectacles and rubbed them vigorously, "you mean Miss Sigbert."

"Pardon me, I am speaking of Miss Fralli," observed Corrie, in one of her numerous imperious tones.

"It is a name Miss Sigbert sometimes uses," explained Billy, looking at Elfrieda with anxiety in his eyes.

"Indeed?" commented Mr. Monson, suspiciously. "It seems to me — "

"Miss Sigbert is an opera singer," Billy explained; "Fralli is her stage name, her professional name. She is my cousin — we were brought up together."

"Oh," said Mr. Monson, subsiding. "Well, let 's be getting along. We have a big car waiting at the gate, and as the men will remain here until these interned Germans can be taken care of and this property turned over to the Department of Justice, it will accommodate all of us comfortably."

"There's no use going back to Boston at this hour," suggested Corrie. "I'd rather wait here than in that barn of a station. What do you say to a couple of rubbers of bridge?"

"Better make sure of an early train," answered Mr. Monson.

"Oh, very well, then, but I shan't stir a step until I have had a cocktail," and Corrie sat down in front of the fire with a gesture that left no ground for argument.

"Make mine a highball," laughed Mr. Monson. "I guess we can spare the butler for a moment. Roberts, you go along with him to the pantry, please."

"Pantry!" exclaimed Corrie, dramatically. "I'm starving. Some sandwiches, Ludwig!"

"I'll get them," cried Billy, eagerly, starting up.

"Thank you, dear boy."

"Miss Sigbert must be quite faint after this trying night." He hurried from the room, and Corrie followed him with her eyes, and then glanced down at Frieda, a crumpled heap in the big arm chair.

"Oh," said Corrie, and walked slowly to the window, and stood watching the sea as it came to life in the soft light of approaching dawn. "And I had thought," she added to herself, "that I was going to get out of this without any punishment."

CHAPTER XXIV

"HOW CAN I LEAVE THEE?"

"Anybody home?"

"Come in," smiled Billy, going to the door, and shaking hands with Corrie. He watched Elfrieda's face as he took her hand, but could make nothing of the inscrutable look that lay in the depths of her eyes.

"Her position is intolerable," he thought. "I can do nothing now, nothing to help her in any way. She would feel her dependence on me, she might even think there was an obligation to be kind now where she has been cold before. I must be careful, and set a guard upon my words."

They walked into Neil's living room. The shades were drawn to the tops of the windows, and the bright, warm April sun was streaming in. The sky had donned the springtime garb of blue it wears in Washington.

"Just ran down to look in and let you know that we are quite rested," chirped Corrie. "You are going away?"

Billy took a suitcase from the couch, and threw it into a corner.

" This evening," he replied listlessly.

" Shall I help you pack? " asked Frieda.

" They may be cousins," thought Corrie, " and reared together when they were children, and all that sort of thing, and I suppose it 's all right, but somehow I can't get used to it."

" Thanks, no, I 've finished," Billy was saying.

Frieda would not look at him, but stood at the window, staring out across the roof-tops of the town that lay stretched at her feet like a languid woman arousing from her sleep.

" He is different," she thought, " the warmth in his eyes has gone, and the smile is not the same. He was not like this when I came. I have brought wretchedness and misery upon him. No doubt he hates me, now, and Mrs. Winters — she is very good looking." She turned from the window. Billy was filling his cigarette case.

" You are really going? " she asked.

" Very soon, now. I expect my orders at any moment."

" And then — "

" Good bye."

" You must feel — it must be wonderful," she said, with a flash of feminine intuition.

"One does not get a chance like this every day," he replied soberly. "It is what we have all dreamed of, worked for — and now — !"

"I have seen so many go, these last three years," said Frieda, her face very pale. "I know how it feels. Even the women understand, although they only stay behind, to grieve, and wait — and wait."

"The man in Germany!" thought Billy. "He was killed in action! After that, there can never be a place in her heart for me. There is nothing left but the affection of a cousin, there has never been anything else. I shall have to give her up, and put these dreams forever from my mind."

He could see now, what he had never seen before, that she did not really love him, had never loved him, else his waiting would have ended long ago. "If I cannot have all her love, it is better that I should have none," he thought. "Still, she will always be, as she has always been, the only one for me."

"I shall be lonely," said Frieda.

He looked up quickly, all his resolution gone in an instant.

"Mrs. Winters is going away," she explained, reddening.

"Oh! I see. Where now, Corrie, or east or west?"

"I 'm going to box the compass," laughed Corrie, "I 'm going everywhere. I adore it."

"See you in — Kamchatka." He laughed. "Back to the Orient, or is it a mere flying trip to Paris — London?"

"It 's a secret — can't tell you," and Corrie smiled with delight. "Miss Sigbert has promised to keep my apartment, so I shall always have a nice, comfy place to run back to. I 'll be in town from time to time."

"You are very good, Corrie," said Billy, trying not to let his voice betray his gratitude. He felt relieved to know that in his absence Elfrieda would remain in Washington, where his friends, and Corrie's, would be company and protection for her.

"I am going down to Old Point tonight," Corrie added.

"I am planning to go to Hampton Roads this evening myself, by boat." There was genuine pleasure in Billy's voice. Between him and this woman of inextinguishable youth there had long been a comradeship that had been, to him, as nearly platonic as any relationship between two people of opposite sex can be.

"I should not have come," thought Frieda, watching him. "There are others in his life. I do not see how I can stay here, now."

Corrie's eyes were dancing with the delight she always found in everything, even the trifles of life, the ever-bubbling spring of joy in her nature that kept her young.

"That will be splendid," she said. Elfrieda tried to find a source of satisfaction in it too, for his sake, and could not.

There was somebody at the door, and when Corrie ran to open it, little Wallis came in, bathed in gloom, saturated in woe.

"What 's up?" asked Billy, quickly.

"Why — why —" stammered Wallis.

"I see it in your face," said Billy.

"You have n't heard, then?"

"Heard what?"

"I suppose it is my fate to be the bearer of bad news," said little Wallis. "I hoped somebody else had told you, but I see you don't know." He found a cigarette on the table, lighted it, looked out of window, fidgeted into a chair and jerked himself nervously out of it again, and finally said:

"Your orders have been revoked."

"I have n't had my orders yet," said Billy; "I 'm expecting them now, and intend to join the flagship tomorrow morning."

"I mean the orders designating you as Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief."

Billy said nothing, but he looked as though somebody had struck him a blow in the face. The blood mounted to his scalp.

"I 'm terribly sorry," said Wallis.

"Thank you, old man." Billy found his voice.

"I know how you feel."

He nodded.

"It 's an outrage," cried Wallis. "Man! I did n't know how it would cut you up — "

"I 'll get over it," replied Billy. "I 've weathered other bitter disappointments. They all serve their purpose. Have you heard what they propose to do with me?"

"No other orders are out; this one has just been issued. Hollister came up this way ahead of me, I thought maybe you had heard of it from him."

"No, I have n't seen Hollister." He stopped, and then went on, "Wallis, I can speak confidentially to you. They had this done?"

"Who?" asked Wallis, wonderingly.

"Hollister, those men — at the club, you remember — the ones who could n't bear the thought of serving in action under a man who was — born in Prussia. That 's the hardest part about it."

Little Wallis's face broke into a smile. He reached out impulsively, and wrung Billy's hand.

"Hollister 's the maddest one of the bunch," he said. "He 's positively furious. That 's why I thought you might have seen him. He wants to tell you how glad — and proud — he would be to serve with you and under you. All the men I have talked with feel that way about it, Billy. They think it was — magnificent."

"You all know?" Billy looked at him blankly.

"Do you want to see the headlines?"

Billy groaned, and waved the paper aside.

"You should be glad," said little Wallis. "It has made everyone see things as they really are, not as they imagined them to be. The men had nothing to do with this, old fellow, absolutely nothing. They were more surprised than anybody when the order was issued. There was no recommendation of it. Why don't you ask Marshfield? He might know. He was at the Department yesterday afternoon, and again this morning."

"I guess you 'll have to go to Old Point alone, Corrie," smiled Billy.

"Old Point! I 'm going down tonight. Delighted!" and little Wallis fairly danced. He had found that he could talk to Mrs. Winters now without getting tongue-tied, and the discovery enchanted him. "Well, I must be getting along," he added. "Shall I see you on the boat?"

"I 'll be there," answered Corrie, "look me up."

Wallis danced out, and at the door bumped into a quiet-looking, middle-aged gentleman in spectacles. It was Mr. Monson, and they were all glad to see him, much as if he had been a long-lost friend, instead of a recent acquaintance whom they had parted from but a few hours before.

" I went up to see you, Mrs. Winters," explained Mr. Monson. " The maid said that you were here, so I thought I would n't wait, but would come right down."

" Charmed, I 'm sure," said Corrie.

" So this is the apartment where they tied you up, is it? " he asked Billy, looking around with professional interest.

" He," amended Billy, " not they."

" I have shamed him before his friends, before all the world," thought Frieda, going back to the window. " I wish I were dead."

Mr. Monson peeped into the bedroom, where the trunk and bags were scattered about.

" Going away? " he asked.

" I was," answered Billy.

" What 's happened? "

" My orders have been revoked; I have just learned of it."

" Well," said Mr. Monson, " we all have disappointments, so cheer up, Commander. I want to say," he added, "that it 's all right about that telegram to the janitor."

He took a sheaf of papers from his pocket, and shuffled through them.

"Here is it," he said, and held out a slip. "Recognize that, Miss Sigbert?"

"That is a copy of the telegram I sent to the janitor from New London," said Elfrieda.

"And a clever one it was," declared Mr. Monson, wagging his head approvingly. "Did you file any other telegrams at the same time?"

"Not for myself," said Frieda.

"For anybody?"

"Yes, two."

"Can you identify them?"

"Of course."

"Kindly find them for me."

Elfrieda took a file of telegram duplicates, and ran through them swiftly. "Here they are," she said.

"Hum!" said Mr. Monson, reading, "this is to the chauffeur, directing him to meet the train at Clifton Junction. I know about this one."

"Here 's the other," and Elfrieda pointed it out to him.

"Yes, this one is more interesting," commented Mr. Monson. "I could n't quite make it out. It 's to White, Hannibal G. White —" he glanced at

Mrs. Winters — " 'W. H. unsatisfactory see Bruch immediately.' Signed 'S.' That 'S' is for 'Sabiston,' of course, but who the dickens is Bruch?"

" 'W. H. unsatisfactory,' " repeated Corrie, looking over his shoulder.

"Does that mean anything to you, Mrs. Winters?"

"Not a thing," said Corrie, shaking her head doubtfully, "I don't know anybody named Bruch, never heard of him."

"The name is familiar to me," said Billy.

"He is in the Navy?"

"Oh, no," answered Billy. "There is a Bruch in my State, the political boss. He is the campaign manager of Senator Marshfield."

"Marshfield!" cried Corrie, her face suddenly turning scarlet. "I wonder if 'W. H.' could stand for 'William Hartmann'?"

"What makes you suspect that?" demanded Mr. Monson, looking at her with admiring eyes that seemed to say, "Smart woman!"

"Marshfield had Billy appointed Assistant Chief-of-Staff to the Commander-in-Chief," she said slowly.

"This Bruch, he probably did that," cried Mr. Monson. "It 's as plain as day."

"No, he did n't," interrupted Corrie, looking away, " no, I happen to know that Bruch did n't have anything to do with that."

" He might have had," insisted Mr. Monson. " These initials must refer to William Hartmann. Unsatisfactory! Well, they 've got you out, what? "

" I ought to tell you something," said Billy, " something I learned only recently. Marshfield appointed me to Annapolis — and Bruch told him to do it."

" And now he 's told him to take this assignment away from you," finished Mr. Monson.

" And I filed the telegram," Elfrieda cried out. " I have brought nothing but trouble and disgrace upon you since I came." She sat down, trembling. " I have ruined his career," she thought. " How he must despise and loathe me."

Mr. Monson turned, and looked down at her curiously, his eyes snapping away at a furious rate.

" Did you know what that telegram was when you filed it, Miss Sigbert? "

Her face colored, as she stood up, indignation blazing from her eyes.

" Mr. Monson! " she said.

" There, now, there, now," he said soothingly, " I knew you did n't."

" Oh, nobody thinks that, Frieda," interjected Billy, hastily.

"It 's absurd," said Corrie.

"I was simply the messenger." She looked at Billy imploringly. "I did n't know anything, Billy. You believe me, don't you?"

"Of course, Frieda, everyone understands."

"How about this Bruch?" said Mr. Monson. "That 's what we are interested in. He must be somebody. What office does he hold?"

"He has never held any office," said Billy.

"That 's so, the big fellows never do," agreed Mr. Monson. "Pull the wires on the outside, and make a barrel of money while nobody is looking. I know the type."

"He 's a millionaire lumberman, must be about seventy now. I knew him when I was a child. He came from Düsseldorf, too, and knew my people there."

"A German!" cried Mr. Monson, striking an attitude. "Now are n't they the most obliging people you ever knew in all your born days? They don't let a little thing like a war stop their philanthropy, no indeed, they pitch right in and help us run it. Little hitch up at the Navy Department, and Mr. Bruch gives up all his private affairs, neglects his family, and takes right hold. Bruch orders Marshfield, and Marshfield — "

"Senator Marshfield was at the Department yesterday afternoon, and again this morning," reminded Corrie, helpfully, "Wallie said so." Mr. Monson regarded her with an approving eye.

"Bruch gets his orders from White, and Mrs. Sabiston gives the tip to White. I suppose she received her instructions from Berlin," added Mr. Monson, "by way of that cute little toy radio."

"I don't think so," ventured Billy, after a moment. "It is Karl's work. He got me!"

"I am going to take a hand in this," said Mr. Monson, in his very crispest tone. "You just do like br'er rabbit, and watch me. Politics at a time like this!"

"Marshfield is very powerful," said Billy, doubtfully; "just about runs the government. He says the President is going to have a third term."

"He is trying to capitalize the President's popularity for his own benefit," replied Mr. Monson, in the cynical tone a Washingtonian always uses. "He is coming up for re-election himself next time, see? He thinks he 's managing editor of the whole works, but all his plans will go to smash. He 's on the Naval Committee, and they do have to knuckle down to him some, but I 'll fix him — when I have attended to his case he won't be able to pry his way into the White House with a crowbar." He turned to Corrie.

"How well do you know Senator Marshfield, Mrs. Winters?" he asked in a low tone. "Maybe — when you come back from Fortress Monroe — well, I 'll take that up with you later. And now, can I see you about that matter down there?"

"Come right up to my apartment," smiled Corrie cheerfully, "and we can have a nice, long talk." She called over her shoulder, at the door, "Excuse me, won't you — I 'll be back."

Elfrieda, in a simple little pink dress, sat in the sunshine, and Billy watched her as he went to the table, and found the cigarettes.

"Will you join me?" he asked, offering her his case.

"Thank you, no."

"I thought — "

"I 'm not a real opera singer yet, Billy," she reminded him.

"— that maybe Corrie had taught you how. That 's where all the young girls learn. They are crazy about her."

"The men seem very fond of her, too," said Frieda, "I never saw a woman with so many friends. She is so — interesting."

"She is an institution," laughed Billy, "we could not get along without her."

"You have known her long?"

"Do you remember the day I spent with you in Berlin, when I was on my midshipman cruise?"

"Of course, Billy. We walked in the *Tiergarten,* and sat on the bench under the lindens."

"And then you sent me away," he finished slowly. "Well, when we left Kiel the ship touched at Malta, and I met Corrie there. Her husband was a Consul, then. A year later I ran across her in the Orient. She was a widow, and trying to remember it, and after that I met her everywhere. She has a wanderlust, and loves her freedom more than any woman I have ever known — but one."

"It is plain that she is a widow from choice."

"Her scalps would fill a wigwam, but she is wary, she could not settle down."

"A navy man was made for her," said Frieda.

"A good many of them have thought so," Billy laughed.

"She will marry some day, I am sure."

"The flags will be at half mast if she does."

"I wonder if he loves her?" thought Elfrieda. "Certainly, he is no longer mine." She looked away across the rooftops, and the forest of trees, lining all the streets and avenues, coming to life and putting on their Easter clothes, and suddenly her soul felt limp, and all her heart seemed ebbing away. "I thought the other day that I had ruined his life," she said to herself, "but now I see that I have spoiled my own. I have thrown away his love."

She got up quickly, and began walking up and down the room nervously, her hands clasped behind her head.

"Billy," she said presently, "I want to go into the Red Cross."

There was sympathy and understanding in his look as he replied, "I think it would be splendid, Frieda. You have done work of that kind in Germany?"

"No," she replied slowly, "I did nothing there until I — I let them send me here. Oh, Billy, do you hate me for coming here?"

"You promised me, one day in the arbor at home, that you would come back to me," he said, evading her question, and wished he had not spoken. "I am always forgetting myself," he thought. "She does not remember things like that."

"I always intended to, Billy, always, but I never dreamed that I would come the way I did."

"Don't scourge yourself, Elfrieda. You came because you thought that when you reached here you would find me with you, on your side."

"Yes, that is true," she cried eagerly; "I did."

"Well, we are on the same side."

"You think — I know it 's true — and yet — I have blundered so, and I have broken my oath. It hurts, Billy, it hurts me terribly."

"Oath, Frieda? What oath?"

"I swore to Karl I would not betray my country. He made me, but I swore it, just the same."

"And when the test came, Frieda, you were true."

"What — I do not understand — oh, yes, I do — this is my country, is n't it?"

"You are paying the penalties of a dual nationality, Frieda — and so am I. Grit your teeth, and hold on. We are under the knife now, and the operation is severe, but it will cure. Only those whose roots in a country go deeper than ours escape unscathed at a time like this, and there are many like us, in this country, in every country. Boundary lines are more distinct on the map than they are in the census. Find out where your allegiance lies, and then hang on like grim death."

"You do not have to find it," said Elfrieda; "it 's a thing that comes to you, Billy, like something very clear and illuminating that pops into your mind at night, just as you are dropping off to sleep. I know where my allegiance belongs — this is my country — but I shall have my heartaches, just the same."

"The man in Germany!" said Billy, thinking aloud.

"What 's that?" she cried, startled by his tone, and turning to him swiftly.

"Forgive me, Frieda, I did not mean to speak of it again. You are entitled to your sorrow, your grief for him, your love. I did not mean to hurt you."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"The man in Germany — who died, the man — you told me about him, the day we were in the country together."

"I am so foolish and silly, Billy. There was no man in Germany."

"No man — "

"There never was. It 's just the romance in me. I 'm always saying things like that, because they — they sound — you think I 'm quite absurd, don't you — it 's the drama of it, Billy. . . . A foolish little fib."

"Frieda!" He went to her across the room, and stopped. The bell was ringing.

"Confound it!"

Elfrieda opened the door.

"Miss Sigbert, here is a letter for you." Mr. Monson's face was beaming.

"Oh — thank you."

"I 'm sorry — delayed — I hope you will understand. I told Peters it was a shame. I put it in my pocket to give to you, and forgot it. Well, better late than never, you know." He trotted off.

"Why, Billy," said Elfrieda, "it's one of yours — and it has been opened."

"The letter I wrote to you the night I arrived in Washington. They have held it up. It is an outrage, I shall see about it."

Elfrieda sat down on the piano bench, tore away the envelope, and began reading. Once she looked up at him, quickly, under her lashes.

"What is it, Frieda?"

"You have changed, since you wrote this?"

"Changed? No, Frieda, I have never changed. I have always been the same."

She finished the letter, and thrust it in her dress, her hands found the keys, she struck a mighty chord, and then she sang, wildly, madly, exultantly; all the golden melody of her soul came pouring out.

Billy leaned toward her across the piano. Her mood changed, and she began, softly, the little song that she had sung for Ruhlmann, and as she raised her crimson face he saw that in her mist-dimmed eyes the purple light was shining for him.

THE END

University of California Library
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Phone Renewals
310/825-9188

OCT 06 1997

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 041 812 9

Un